

Dragoon

Arc 4

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Novel Updates

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# Chapter 81: The Young Men and the Festival's Eve

Around the time Rudel was training in the dragons' dwellings, Aleist was also training to master his own powers.

"Aleist-sama's so cool!!"

... But by Aleist's popularity at the academy, female students would gather around him on a regular basis. Whether he swung his sword or used his magic, those shrill cheers would fly his way. But every time the man in question received those cheers, he would fall into a slump.

(This is wrong. This isn't how it was supposed to be.)

The scenery he had once longed for was now the norm. But Aleist had only just confessed his love to Millia. Truthfully, he would be satisfied if only Millia was there, and while he didn't want to be hated by those around him, he didn't want to be liked this much.

Before his final individuals' tournament at the academy, he needed to train and gain as much control of his powers as he could. This would be the last time Aleist would be able to fight against Rudel.

(Well, no one knows what the future holds. If possible, I do hope this is the last... I really would like to avoid any death matches in the future.)

The future he spoke of was what came after the war with the empire. While he had knowledge from his game, Aleist didn't know what would become of the future of the Courtois Kingdom. No, the way things were going, he couldn't even predict how things would turn out.

He had become the black knight, and the side character Rudel was the white knight.

(He proclaimed himself the White Dragoon or something, so is he still aiming to be a dragoon after all? In that case, what's going to happen during the war? I think the last boss will be easy picking for Rudel and Sakuya as they are now, but...)

Imagining Rudel riding Sakuya, Aleist recalled her magnificent fall. The

impression they gave off during the selection test was strong, and he could vividly picture a scene of them dive-bombing straight into the last boss.

(Yep, it's starting to feel kinda hopeless.)



Around noon, Aleist visited the cafeteria with his friends.

With his daily morning training and his academy classes, he had a healthy hunger. Once he entered the cafeteria, he found the similarly hungry male students, and the female students chatting amiably with their friends as they filled the seats.

Lining up in the food line, Aleist's friend looked around to search out an empty seat. But from what he could see, they were all filled in, so he let out a complaint.

"We were late after all. If only we'd been a bit earlier."

Aleist looked around as well, fully agreeing with that sentiment. The class he had been in was held in the classroom furthest from the cafeteria. And as he had a chat while he walked, he ended up a little later than usual. This situation came forth from only a little extra time, so his friends continued to search out any seat that seemed open enough.

There, one of his friends spotted Aleist's exclusive seat.

"Ah, Aleist, there's an empty seat over there."

"Eh? ... Ah, no, I want to eat with you guys today."

Following his friend's gaze, he found the five female students those around recognized as his girlfriends eating at the same table. At that round table, there was only one seat left open.

It was a table of beauties, but no one even tried to sit down. From the start, they let off an air that made it hard to approach, but it was also clear that seat had been saved for a certain someone.

As Aleist averted his eyes, he felt a cold sweat break out. The harem lunch he had imagined time after time, always wishing to experience once in his life, after going through it once, he never wanted to taste it again. On top of not

being able to tell the taste of what he was putting in his mouth, when everyone was smiling, there was this strange tension in the air...

Just remembering brought him pain.

"... No, it'll be terrible if you don't go, Aleist."

"That's right! We've followed through for you a few times, so those girls remember our faces. For the sake of our peace, go sacrifice your lunch time."

"Lay off me! I want to stand by Millia alone!"

Aleist put up resistance, but his friends shook their heads. That wasn't an envy against a man who built up a harem, they were sending him eyes of pity.

"Give it up. You have some fault in this."

"Because of that, we learned something. Harems are beautiful precisely because they're dreams."

"It's amazing they permit you to have five lovers. Though it seems they all think they're number one."

Aleist held his head. Building an urge to punch his past harem-dreaming self, he realized how exceedingly terrible this situation was. His confession to Millia hadn't gone down well. If they ever locked eyes, their faces would turn red and no words would come out. There wasn't much time left until they would graduate the academy.

In contrast, talks with the five who made up Aleist's harems were going more smoothly than he had ever imagined.

First was Yunia Luneice, and she was a girl of a Marquis House. Aleist's parents were also exceedingly on board their talks of engagement. The Luneice Marquis House had evaluated Aleist highly for being the black knight. The black knight tied to the founding of the nation, if their daughter were to be with him... honestly, they were fine if she was a mistress.

Aleist would eventually become a mainstay of the country, and they had no objections with the slightest increase in authority they could get.

Following on was Seli, and she was also being pushed for strongly by her house. As it was a former noble military house, once they learned of the existence of what could be called the strongest knight, they cheerfully brought

up talks of marriage.

Recovering their own status was probably included in their field of vision, but Aleist's parents had given approval.

Juju said she had no problem if the head of the household-Aleist- told her to be a mistress. Apart from the fact her letters revealed she was a bit dissatisfied her partner wasn't Rudel, there wasn't anything particularly threatening about her. The fact there was nothing was the scariest part...

Lux and the blue haired girl Ciel were commoners, and their families were more delighted than he had expected. Aleist's parents scolded him for finding too many mistresses, but they didn't put up any particular opposition.

They simply smiled and informed him of their hopes a legal wife would soon come from out of his mistresses.

(That's definitely strange! What's with 'great men have a great fondness for women'! When I thought my parents were on edge from factional disputes these days, they were happily talking about how one of the princesses might marry me!!)

"You're the worst."

Seeing Aleist hand his head, the male students glared at him with jealousy. As he received those envy-tinged eyes, Aleist was warned by his friends.

"Yep, we know you so we can sympathize, but those around aren't quite so understanding... now resolve yourself and head to that table."

"You really should be careful walking home at night. There really are some folks aiming for your life."

"If anything happens, feel free to discuss it!"

"Then save me. Now."

On Aleist's words, his friends all took a glance at the table where those five were waiting before answering with smiles. At the table waiting for Aleist, they were all smiling too, but it was somehow terrifying.

"Impossible."

"Sorry."

“Godspeed.”



At that time, Izumi was in the cafeteria watching Aleist from afar, when Luecke and Eunius sitting at her table called out.

They had finished their meals, and now they were sipping on drinks as they talked. About the future, and mostly about the individuals' tournament. Eunius was worried about Rudel's participation, and while Luecke wasn't taking part, he said he was busy with preparations. But as Izumi sent a glance in Aleist's direction, the conversation naturally flowed towards Aleist.

“He did it again? Aleist really never learns, does he. You're not usually supposed to date them all in public. Cheating is something you're supposed to do in secret.”

On Eunius' fed-up face, Luecke was even more fed up.

“You're usually not supposed to cheat to begin with. But I am impressed with how he's going off to be surrounded by them now.”

“... Hey, Izumi, does Rudel cheat? Or is it that? Does it depend on your definition of the word?”

Thinking up something, Eunius tried asking Izumi about Rudel. While Rudel had conducted much problematic behavior on a regular basis, he was earnest in the strangest of places. But they were dealing with Rudel. There was no way to be certain he wasn't getting women in the mood where they weren't looking.

In truth, Rudel had a repertoire of special anti-women skills.

Izumi shook her head and told Eunius she didn't have the answer he was looking for.

“Ever since he declined that confession from the princess, those around couldn't bring themselves to confess... no, but Ness-san did volunteer to be his slave.”

“... That one really is terrifying.”

On Eunius' murmur, Luecke thought for just a moment on whether he meant Rudel or Ness. He concluded that both sides were terrifying.

"There was a time the girls' dorm was a mess from all the victims. I really am glad I sealed his petting. We were almost too late."

Thinking back on it, it all seemed so shameful, but the girls' dorm really was in a terrible state. When there were some who purposely came out to be pet by Rudel, Izumi recalled how she wanted to cry. She wanted to believe it was her imagination when she saw so many familiar faces among those who petitioned for her to lift the petting ban.

But there, Luecke's joke became an unlaughable one.

"You sealed his petting, right? Perhaps you've made him polish some skill besides petting."

As Luecke laughed, Eunius wholeheartedly jumped onto the conversation.

"Right, it's him we're dealing with, so I'm sure he'll do something right out of the left field. Let's see... I'm sure he can get a woman to fall just by smiling at them."

"No way. It's much more realistic to think he'll make them fall with a conversation without even realizing it. I'm sure before he notices, the situation around him will become like Aleist's."

"Not noticing when someone's fallen for him! How Rudel!"

While the two of them laughed, Izumi tried to return the derailing conversation to its tracks. She suddenly got a bad feeling their words would become a reality. Rudel could make someone feel good just by petting them. It wouldn't be strange if he could make a woman fall with just a smile.

And it was also plausible he wouldn't notice their affection. He definitely did have some dense parts, and romance matters weren't Rudel's area of expertise.

(Not that I'm an expert either, but I should be careful...)

While Izumi thought, this time the topic of conversation, Rudel, called over. It was good that he had returned from the dragons' dwellings, but the headmaster cautioned him for dragging the princess off, and he was finally freed when lunch came around.

Surprisingly, Fina's sage mode persisted for a while, and she made it clear to

the headmaster that he hadn't done anything that would warrant such worry so he was released early. If there was any scandal with royalty, then this wasn't just a problem for Rudel or the Arses House.

"Can I eat with you three?"

Ignoring their surprise, Rudel took a seat and began eating his special of the day set.



"Just where did you go, Rudel!?"

"I really was worried you wouldn't make it to the tournament."

"You look quite refreshed. Did you gain something from your trip?"

Izumi's loud voice, Eunius' true relief, and seeing Rudel's expression, Luecke began to predict what he could have gained.

"Yeah, the truth is I went to the dragons' dwellings. Under Marty-sama's water dragon, I polished some new techniques. I learned the necessary things to be a dragoon."

As Rudel answered with a smile, the three of them nodded. Of course, they were sure he had trained himself for the individuals' tournament. Eunius was curious what Rudel had learned, and with practically the excitement of a child, he tried to find it out.

"So what exactly did you gain this time?"

Rudel put a temporary hold on his meal, thinking back through what he had picked up as he explained.

"First, about dragoons. Their fighting style fundamentally changes based on the size of their dragons, but I was told what a dragoon needs is the ability to direct a dragon."

Those that directed dragons were dragoons. While it was important for a dragoon to protect a dragon's blind spot on its back, their original role was to manipulate a powerful dragon to their will. Their powerful firepower, movement distance and speed, when put under precise instruction, their results would swell up several times over.

From a dragon's point of view, even if you told it to defeat the enemy, it only saw humans all the same. In that case, a dragoon capable of conveying thoughts would have to give orders. There were also cases where the dragon was used to move loads and numerous fields where their powers could be put to use. He was taught that a dragoon's role was to make the best use of his dragon.

"I see, is something we wouldn't understand. I'm sure it's a trouble only dragoons will get."

Eunius looked at Rudel's serious expression and was sure he had seriously studied. But the next words from Rudel's mouth left the three in a daze.

"Oh, I also learned some applications. A dragoon's special way of movement, and also... hugging and massages, I guess?"

"... Eh?"

Luecke let out an idiotic voice, but Rudel explained on without paying it any mind.

"Yeah, that really was a surprise. When I told her my petting was sealed, she taught me all sorts of applications. It hasn't been named yet, but there's this technique where you hug and use your mana to apply a shock, and I got a high effect by changing the petting to pressure-based massages."

Eunius looked at Luecke's face, comparing the contents of their talk to what Rudel had just said.

"Oy, that wasn't even the left field, he just swung straight and hit. Straight down the center."

"Yeah, I never thought we'd get a frontal attack from him. I'll have to ask about it later."

The two of them were certain he would pick something up apart from petting, but the problem was Izumi. Izumi had sealed Rudel's petting with just a word. When it came to other techniques, the two of them were curious to see what sort of measures Izumi would take.

Her dumbfounded expression turning to a smile, Izumi called over to Rudel.

"Rudel."

"Hmm?"

"You can't hug or massage either."

"Why!!? Neither of them have anything to do with petting! Just listen to me, Izumi, these new techniques are at a level capable of satisfying a princess and high knight! I thought you'd accept it this time. So let me try it on you, just once."

On the appearance of an individual that should never come out, Luecke and Eunius pretended they hadn't heard anything. They had heard rumors that no one had seen the princess lately, but they never thought she had been out with Rudel.

But Izumi couldn't stand without confirming it.

"I-it couldn't be that you laid hands on the princess, right?"

"No, I just embraced her. She was serious about it too. As a master, I thought it was unacceptable for me to hold back. Don't worry, I held her gently. Though I cast her into the lake after that."

As a result of being freed from the petting, Fina had fallen into the lake, but Rudel was terrible at explanations, and at his words, the three of them lost their ability to speak.

(No way! That's no good, Rudel!! And you threw her away after that!!?)  
(What'll become of this. Will he be able to take part in the individuals' tournament?)

(So he threw her away at the end? If you just listened to that, it would be a terrible story. Well, it's Rudel here, so unless I hear the details, I won't be able to make any decision...)

It was the moment a new legend was born at the academy.



A few days later, Fina was depressed in her room, having recovered from sage mode.

"I went and did it. It was my big chance... (What am I going to do about this!)? Stupid, stupid, stupid me!! For me to discard my big chance on a temporary

wavering of spirit... my master is a scary man)."

Her guard Sophina looked at her depressed state and spat some toxicity.

"So marriage isn't a sacred rite?

On those words, Fina raised her face and gazed expressionlessly at Sophina.

"What are you talking about, Sophina? Marriage is a microcosm of war. If you lose, your rights within the family are taken, and you walk a life like that of a slave. The relations in marriage are the same as an alliance. A relation of equivalence is impossible. It's because you hold such maiden-esque delusions that you're forever alone. Look at reality a bit. At this rate, you'll only find regret once you're married... ah, not that you have anyone to marry anyways."

"... This might be forward of me, but that's completely different from what you said before."

"Is that so? Well, that doesn't really matter. More importantly, I have to do something about that black knight idiot... there are talks going forward about an engagement to my sister, but it does seem sister is stubbornly shaking her head."

Her own talks of marriage written off just like that, Sophina desperately calmed herself as she thought only of the next topic of conversation.

"Aileen-sama will marry the black knight? In that case, in the end, the black knight shall also..."

Sophina swallowed the words before they came out. She determined the reason Fina was trying to put Aileen and the black knight together was because Fina herself wanted to marry Rudel. Sophina wondered if that meant Fina was casting away the black knight.

"What are you on about? This is just a bit of harassment against that sister of mine. You should at least notice that much, good grief..."

Against that expressionless princess, Sophina was driven by an impulse to lower a fist on her head. But Fina steadily explained.

"If they press her on the reason for her rejection, it's my sister we're talking about here, so I'm sure she'll spill the beans on that matter with Flit."

"It's Fritz, princess."

"Right, once she opens her mouth about Fritz, it will make it easier to move for father and the others. And while my sister is having her little feud, I'll fill in the outer moat. Well, the formation of the royal guard's already been decided, so I doubt there'll be any assassins after Fritz at this point. If my sister stops being stubborn and gives up on Fritz, that'll be the end of it."

Fina didn't particularly feel like going at her sister's throat. But seeing her sister's mayhem, she wouldn't stand around without setting up countermeasures. From the emotional trauma of a past incident, Aileen was doted on by her parents much more than was necessary.

Her parents were soft on her, so even if Fina cautioned them, they would simply take it that she was reading too deeply.

If they were male, they would undergo strict education after which their marriage partners would be those most profitable to the country. But the male heir the land wanted was never born, and as a result, there were only two princesses. If these doted-on two were suddenly put under strict instruction, there would be a backlash.

The king was immediately forced into taking mistresses, but it came to light that the problem lay with the king himself. He couldn't have a son. So Courtois would be welcoming a son in from elsewhere.

It was something necessary within the scenario, but the game's characters were never told the reason. In order to make a king of the hero who saved the country, a situation was made where the king's seat was purposely left open, yet those characters on their stage would never give it a second thought.

"If my sister gives up, it won't be a problem for me. But, I really doubt she will... when you think of it like that, perhaps my sister is similar to master."

Fina's face was expressionless, but to Sophina, it looked as if she was just a bit sorrowful.

## **Chapter 82: The Night Before the Festival and the Pitch Black Armor**

In the academy, preparations were underway for what would be to Rudel and the other fifth years—their final individuals' tournament.

This time's tournament would be the last festival for what those in the academy had started to call the golden generation. The royal family and the nobles wouldn't miss this last great competition, with tensions rising far above the norm.

It goes without saying the royal family's participation was something Fina laid the groundwork for. But once the royal family showed interest, the nobles began volunteering one after the next.

The academy was a ruckus from top to bottom and it was decided the tournament would take on a different form from the usual. Competitors would still be selected in the same way from their achievements up to the appointed date, but they had decreased the numbers. They planned to hold only the finals, but from the voices of nobles and other hopeful competitors, the top eight students were chosen to take part.

Of course, with balance in mind, Rudel, Eunius, and Aleist would be in different groups during the preliminaries. It was concluded so, for if the three of them collided in the preliminaries, the spectators would likely find the finals to be quite unsatisfactory.

The reconstruction of the arena had it reinforced, taking into account the possible matchup between the white and black knights. Luecke had personally volunteered to take on the task. He said he would secure the safety of the arena's spectators.

He planned to use the individuals' tournament to unveil the knight brigade the Halbades House had been preparing for a few years. While he had considered concealing them, the Halbades House was never said to excel in military might, and he intended to show the other nobles their power.

By his work, the top eight competitors could take on their matches at full strength. But those involved with the school held their heads as they imagined Rudel mustering all his might again.

In a meeting room where those personnel gathered, a meeting on the tournament was running on. Preparations were underway, but they couldn't help but be anxious. The reason being all their problem children starting with white knight Rudel. They could never be optimistic about those students who would always run contrary to their expectations.

"Finally, the time has finally come."

On the heavy words the headmaster spat out, everyone gathered silently nodded. Ever since the golden generation enrolled, there were numerous problems that plagued the academy, all leading up to their graduation year.

Two dangerous monster appearances during wilderness training, one of which was an incident that enraptured princess Fina. It was an incident that made the academy considerably fearful.

In the class battles, a number of matches unthinkable at the level of the fundamental curriculum. These would often produce abnormal situations where all the legitimate heirs of the Three Lords were hospitalized at once.

If Rudel participated, he would be hospitalized without fail. In the infirmary, there were some rumors of a perfect attendance award being prepared for him.

The problem involving the commoner Fritz, and the First Princess Aileen's interference... Rudel's free pass into the girls' dormitory, toleration of Aleist's implied illicit sexual relations, Eunius' customary breaking of curfew, the ever-updating record of destroyed facilities in Luecke's magic research... there would be no end if everything was brought up, but to the teachers and staff who had surmounted countless incidents, their sensations had been numbed.

They who supported Rudel and the others from the shadows, they were now putting the finishing touches on what could be called their last festival.

"Reinforcement of the arena is going steadily. No problem in the security of the royal family and high-ranking nobles... but I'm sure you all already understand. That is never enough!"

Everyone nodded. No matter how wary they were of Rudel and co, they could never be wary enough.

"Fina-sama also gave an order to remain cautious of Aileen-sama's movements. This year, Fritz-kun is going to be competing in the matches, and there are some grudges to be had. She wants us to be wary of the competitors as well. Well, I doubt they'll do anything too stupid."

"Leave it to us, headmaster. In this tournament, we've prepared a separate waiting room for each individual competitor. Thanks to Fina-sama, we've prepared an ample number of guards."

"As I recall, they were a unit established to fill in the hole created by the royal guard, correct? Are the 'defenders' up to par? We can't allow failure at the end of the end."

"That isn't a problem. They are seasoned fighters gathered from the farthest reaches of the kingdom."

"... But why are there so many demi-humans? No, I'm not trying to say I hate demi-humans or anything, it's just a strange inclination in their selection, or rather..."

"The royal guard's in the same boat. That side feels like a gathering of ideologists, after all."

As the conversation derailed, the headmaster held up a hand. Everyone grew quiet and eyes began gathering on his face.

"Everyone, this is our last festival. Exercise adequate caution."

The festival they spoke of, it was a word that referred to any school event that involved the problem children. While it was a word laced with cynicism, it was strangely accurate.

The festival's preparations were steadily on their way.



The fact the teaching staff was busy at work meant Fina was carrying out her preparations as well. In order to oppose Aileen, Fina had formed the defenders that would come under her control. They were formed as a miscellaneous job squadron readied to fill in the hole left by the royal guard's formation.

The royal guard whose reason for existence was still in question were Aileen's pieces to play. With Fritz as its future captain, it was an organization of knights who endorsed Aileen. They held high conceit, and from their position that placed them as higher existences than the other knights, they were terribly particular about their work. They were a problem even in the royal palace, and Fina made use of that.

She proposed they gather those of lower status and put them to odd jobs. The maintenance costs of the royal guard were enormous, but maintaining knights originally of lower status could be passed cheaply. Fina's father Albach had shown disapproval of its formation, his opinions aligning with that of the ministers who didn't want anyone forming any more organizations.

With their work taken away, the high knights were also opposed. They were desperate not to let the value of their own existence fall any further.

But by taking a stance that they would take on the work that no other knight brigades wanted to do, their formation was approved. They investigated into the work looked down on by each and bit on.

On top of monster control around the capital, they would respond to calls for reinforcements on the border. While they called themselves defenders, in the name of odd jobs, they stole away the authority of other knight brigades bit by bit, increasing in numbers from the sheer breadth of their work. They were already on the level of a knight brigade. The only reason they could grow to such a size in the short period from their formation came in the demi-human units wasting away in the outer reaches that Fina had recalled.

For Rudel's sake, the captain seat was left empty, but there were plenty of knights abundant in experience to take on deputy roles. Demi-humans were always low in status, so there were those who hated their noble superiors. Fina had sold favors as she gathered them up.

Before the knights whose eyes sparkled at their final chance, Fina expressionlessly expressed her delight.

(Veteran fluffies are the bessssssttt!!)

But unfortunately, Rudel had no interest in the royal guard or defenders. That alone was Fina's largest oversight.



“... I’m getting a chill for some reason.”

“What’s this all of a sudden, Rudel?”

In the cafeteria of the academy busily preparing for the individuals’ tournament, Rudel and Izumi were sitting at a table together. They finished lunch and were putting their mouths to their drinks as they measured the right time to leave. They were so laid back the other students were unable to cause them any trouble.

While the two of them were letting out a calming air, Rudel suddenly began looking around. Finding it strange, Izumi tried asking what had happened, but Rudel’s answer was an ambiguous out.

“No, I suddenly got the feeling someone was aiming at me. Well, the tournament’s ahead of us, so I’m sure everyone’s just high strung. There are quite a few busily moving about.

Luecke was securing the arena’s safety, while Eunius had no other thought than his final adjustments.

“More importantly, you’re really participating in the tournament, Izumi? I’m not sure what to think of that.”

“Are you worried? I’m happy, but you don’t need to hold back. In most cases, women don’t take part in the tournament. But this one’s a bit of a different case.”

Every year, the individuals’ tournament would have many male participants. Besides those confident in their skills, women generally wouldn’t take part. But when it came to making use of mana, there was a tendency for women to be more skilled than men. With the greater ability to reinforce their bodies with magic, rather than the power difference between genders, it came more to the difference in ability among individuals.

The reason there were so many female knights lay in a woman’s advantage in using magic. Lilim was an elf, and thus on a different spectrum, but Cattleya was a good example.

The royal family would be watching this time's individuals' tournament. Izumi had still yet to learn of her tentative high knight offer, so this individuals' tournament was her chance. She would be able to sell herself.

"To be honest, it will be difficult for me to fight you."

Rudel made a displeased face, but he did know Izumi's ability. Her peculiar swordsmanship was on a level Eunius recognized. It was simply Rudel's selfishness in not wanting to take Izumi on in a serious match.

"If you let your guard down, then apart from me, there are plenty who'll pull the carpet out from under your feet. And I passed through the harsh nomination process too, you know. It would be fine if you recognized me a bit."

Like a child with a thing for mischief, Izumi enjoyed teasing Rudel. She already knew Rudel recognized her ability, and it was intended as a bit of a joke.

But jokes often didn't get through to Rudel. While he had been calm as of late, the one with their guard down was Izumi.

"I don't want to hurt you. If any of the other competitors injures you..."

As Rudel's face clouded, the gazes gathered from the students who had been listening in. Rudel and Izumi were famous in the academy. In crowded places, they stood out.

"N-no, Rudel, I'm joking."

"I don't want your pretty body to be wounded."

The man in question put the words to mouth with an innocent sentiment, but the pubescent student body went and interpreted it on your own. 'Your body is mine', the rumor was reinterpreted as hit spread like the nonsense of a telephone game. As embellishments and fins were tacked on to their conversation, it eventually turned into the following.

'I want to enter the individuals' tournament, Rudel.'

'... It makes me sick to my stomach to think any man apart from me will be touching your body.'

'It's just a match, it'll be fine.'

‘Then I’ll kill whoever goes up against you. If they injure you, I’ll slaughter their household.’

Why did it come to this? The delusions of the students that could only bring those words to mind continued to spread, eventually reaching the ears of the staff, and by it, the first matchup of the tournament was forcefully changed to be Rudel against Izumi.



“Sophina, there aren’t many high knights applying.”

Fina expressionlessly processed paperwork with respectable speed. Her form, unlike usual, actually looked diligent. The papers she dealt with pertained to the defenders she had established, and she was doing a proper job.

The reason she was filling those forms in her room was that the one in charge of the defenders was substantially Fina.

“... There’s the matter with the royal guard, but the high knights are facing a shortage of hands. It will be quite bad if we lose any more members.”

While Sophina was by her side, helping out with her work, she was making an unpleasant face. Because she was Fina’s guard, and by no means her secretary. Similarly helping out with work, Mii could only fulfill odd jobs like preparing tea.

Even so, rather than Sophina who could actually help out, Fina’s evaluation of Mii was higher. From how hard she tried to teach Mii the work, Sophina noticed Fina was slowly grooming her into her secretary, and wouldn’t let her run away.

“We really do have too many organizations. While few in numbers, the feuding between knights has increased. It really is a bother.”

“Yes... no matter how you look at it, aren’t you being too wary? Maintaining a knight brigade simply to oppose Aileen-sama is going too far.”

“You’re right. There sure are a lot... then we’ll be having the high knights disappear.”

“Eh?”

Sophina’s hands stop, and Fina cautioned her to keep working. But that wasn’t the problem for Sophina.

“W-what are you talking about, princess?”

“Hmm? We have too many organizations, so we’ll chip some away. The high knights are short on hands, and on top of their jobs being stolen away by the royal guard, their strength falls short of the defenders.”

“W-we do not!”

“We’ll need some organizational reform.”

As Fina calmly carried on with her work, Sophina felt something off. When Fina never stuck hands into anything that didn’t interest her, she suddenly spoke up about organizational reform.

To her lord and master who she knew was scheming as could be, Sophina sent a doubtful look. By the way, normally, Sophina’s master was originally supposed to be the king Albach. The high knights swore loyalty to the king.

Sophina had accepted within that she was rolling on the palm of Fina’s hand.

“Your real goal... is Izumi, isn’t it.”

“... That black hairrr, it’s master’s fault for saying he’ll slaughter the house of whoever touches black hair. If it’s to crush her, I’ll even crush the high knight system. While I’m at it, I’ll be able to take the high knights who’ve lost their place into the defenders all too easily.”

“So we’re just a ‘while I’m at it’!? What do you think our loyalty is supposed to be...”

“Hah, listen well, Sophina. In any case, organizational reform will be needed. On top of Courtois’ standing knight force, we have the dragoons, high knights, royal guard, defenders... if our neighbor wasn’t the Gaia Empire, our military would be severely curtailed. The maintenance cost of a dragon is nothing to laugh at. You can rear dozens of horses at the price of one.”

Sophina couldn’t accept the words of the princess who had flooded the market with organizations to begin with.

“The fragmentation of factions within the organizations was going on from the start. To this point, that wasn’t particularly a problem, but now it won’t stand. By the way, I actually have a proper reason.”

Fina finished up her paperwork before pulling a document from her drawer. It detailed the events surrounding what seemed to be a mystery case on the border.

Terrible as she was at dealing with ghost stories, Sophina divided her attention between the document and her work.

The document suggested the Gaia Empire might be behind the mystery. This was outside Sophina's jurisdiction, so had never even heard of it before.

"Is this... true?"

"It's certain there's been movement. Father's trying to take measures, but he said something was strange. It's as if some force is getting in his way, and he can't take any countermeasures... up to now, there have been a number of small skirmishes. But it does seem they're serious this time."

Fina had a few pieces of evidence that the empire had moved on hand. On top of the movements of people near the border, the flow of goods... they were even strengthening their military. It was the largest movement they had shown in the last few decades.

But what about Courtois on the other side? Even if Albach moved to counteract, for some reason, he wasn't getting anywhere. The high knights were weakening, and the royal guard's increasing authority was creating friction between them and the normal knights.

"Then, then why did you establish the defenders? If you pull troops from the border, we won't be able to do anything when the time comes! Let alone that, I can only think you two princesses are the ones getting in the way..."

"This is why muscle heads are... even if it's the same border, it's not like I pulled any forces off the border with the Empire. And did you really think I'd do anything as foolish as to pull out knights in command of the troops? I've already sent those very defenders to the empire's border to augment their forces."

"G-good work... huh? I didn't hear anything about that!"

"I didn't tell you."

Fina expressionlessly gave a cute gesture, but she was simply covering for the

fact her father Albach couldn't move. Sadly, there was a limit to Fina's authority.

In regards to the high knights as well, she wanted to resolve their lack of commanders on site. She foresaw a situation where the skilled high knights could no longer only be used for defense.

Gathering goods on the border, she stationed soldiers and defenders. But she was overwhelmingly short on numbers. As she was pushing it a bit, she didn't want to involve Sophina.

If someone only heard that much, Fina was proficient. But her motives were simply impure.

Soothing Sophina before she could start a lecture, little by little, Fina explained.

"I cannot accept it, but I understand you are working hard for the sake of this country. So you've finally realized your position as a princess?"

"Of course, that's just a front. When the empire invades, my sister will go on a rampage, unable to read the mood, so I'll restrain her and increase my own value as I grow closer to my dreams of fluffadise... while I'm at it, I originally planned to crush the high knights to get back at black hair. See, when the royal guard and my defenders are fighting in the palace if the high knights aren't under my control, there's no telling how they'll move. (It's obvious, isn't it? Even if I'm rotten, I'm a princess of Courtois. So can't you show some understanding about the high knight matter?)"

Fina accidentally flipped her true feelings and front, Sophina held her head, filling up with the urge to cry out. Right, looking at the results, Fina's actions were correct when it came to defending Courtois. There were surely better ways to go about it, but with Fina's objectives, she couldn't take any other means.

In a situation where the empire was about to invade, Sophina was among the few individuals who had noticed the two large bombs within Courtois.

Mii did listen in to their conversation, but she didn't quite get it so she didn't open her mouth. But from Mii's eyes, it looked as if Sophina was worrying over

the discharge of the high knights.

The reason Albach couldn't move was tied in with the setting. For the sake of the final event to come, the world had begun to move. To make sure Aileen didn't stand out, the ministers turned to oppose Alback, and a large divide was made in Courtois.

So the main character could perform on a desolate battlefield. The enemy was vast... his allies were powerless, and the protagonist came out as a hero.

The Gaia Empire was taking this situation as a chance. Askewell distinguished himself in the military, gradually getting his preparations together.

And once more, Fina was fighting against fate.



"You want armor? Aleist, you don't have any blacksmiths under your house?"

As Rudel was eating lunch with Izumi, Aleist hurriedly rushed in as if fleeing from something. While he had failed to read the mood, Aleist did have a reason.

He wasn't thick enough to spend lunch every day in that grating, hellish environment. Starting with the slight sharpening of eyes, the checks, restraints, and threats slipped into casual conversation... Aleist could no longer taste his food.

Thinking up an arbitrary reason, Aleist had evacuated to Rudel.

Even Aleist's harem couldn't do anything reckless before Rudel.

And the arbitrary reason that came from his mouth was armor. His knight uniform would be prepared for him wherever he was assigned, but the problem was the armor. As the next head of the Hardie House, there were talks about how he needed an armor to represent his own house as well.

"Yeah, mine's an upstart house, and we don't have too many craftsmen under us. There's no problem when it comes to weapons, but I'll have to make a request elsewhere when it comes to armor."

Unlike usual, being able to eat without constraint left Aleist careless. Even when the perpetrator behind his harsh training under the tiger tribe men was undoubtedly Rudel.

Sitting beside them, Izumi watched Rudel think as she sipped her tea.

(It's Rudel we're talking about, so I'm sure he'll cause a problem... but it's just introducing a smithy, so maybe nothing will happen? No, but that's where the Rudel kicks in.)

Izumi's worries perfectly hit on the mark. Rudel had currently left his entire set of equipment to some craftsmen from the east. With maintenance in mind, the craftsmen had shown some interest when the sword and armor they forged had grown, and a new shield had been added on.

Rudel remembered their bloodshot eyes when those craftsmen saw his changed armor.

"I do know some skilled craftsmen."

"Really!?"

"They're a bit strange, but they've got some nice, determined eyes. I left my entire equipment set to them so you can trust in their skill."

At that moment, Izumi's guard was down. When Rudel said he knew a good craftsman, she never even thought they were a troupe from the east. She was sure they were blacksmiths under the Arses House's wing.

If she knew they were an eastern troupe, perhaps she could have cautioned Aleist. That they had peculiar tastes...

"Then is it alright if I make a request?"

"No problem. It'll actually serve as advertising, so I'm sure they'll rejoice. I had them go above and beyond for me, after all."

Rudel had asked them to abandon appearance and make an armor completely specialized to sturdiness, and he remembered how it turned out sturdy enough to surprise him. It really was an armor that had abandoned appearance. It hadn't the slightest hint of an ornament.

But now, because of the boar, it was made into an armor worthy of the white dragoon.

"Then I think I'll take you up on that. How much will it cost?"

"I can't really specify. If you just want an ornament, you might get it cheap, but in your case, you might use it outside of ceremonies... in this case, I think you should get something nice. Even if the country provides them, it's better to have more usable armaments."

"Got it. My parents said it was fine if I pushed it a bit, so I think I'll go and see."

Aleist delightedly finished his lunch, but when the craftsmen Rudel introduced delivered a pitch black armor to his doorsteps a few months later, he crumbled at the knees.

## Chapter 83: The Little Sister and the Barrier

Showing an enthusiasm different from the norm, the day of the individuals' tournament truly was a festival.

In the academy, the knights and soldiers on guard duty nervously carried out their duties, keeping watch over the royalty and nobles.

The areas short of numbers were strengthened with knights dispatched from the defenders.

On the entrance of the competitors onto the arena's circular ring, the clamor reached max pitch at once. There had been a large cheer through the hall when the royal family appeared, but the crowds were even more heated as the competitors took their places.

Among the eight lined up on the ring, apart from Rudel, there was Aleist and Eunius, Izumi, and even Millia.

At the end of the line came Fritz, who had managed to win his nomination despite being a third year.



In a noble visitor room that boasted a full view of the ring sat the royal family and headmaster. Among the royal guard charged with their safety, a single high knight had slipped in.

She was Fina's guard, Sophina, and she was sending some fleeting glances at her former colleagues around her. For every timid glance that returned came another triumphant smirk.

Even the high knights who had resisted at first had read the flow of the times, flowing over to the royal guard. A majority of the knights had transferred station. The royal guard was under Aileen's direct control, giving them a considerably preferential treatment when it came to benefits.

Sophina gazed mournfully at her former colleagues. As she knew what was going down behind the scenes, Sophina couldn't forgive the fact that all her former comrades were dancing on Fina's palm.

Right, Fina had moved towards the dismantlement of the high knights. Sophina had put up a resistance, saying that those with high loyalty would persist as high knights without flowing off to the royal guard. If that happens, I'll put a stop to their dismantlement, Fina had replied.

But looking at the result, a majority of the knights had transferred.

Fina was moving underneath, making sure Aileen didn't notice. She had one transfer, and then another. That was all she did, but hopping onto the flow, a large number chose to transfer. Their numbers were such that even Fina was surprised.

(You dimwits! It's because of you that the high knights will cease to exist!!)

Turning only her eyes to look at Aileen sitting beside her, Fina saw her rejoicing at Fritz' entrance to the stage. Sitting across, on the opposite side of Aileen, her mother the Queen covered her mouth with a fan as she glared at her eldest daughter.

"Aah, how wonderful Fritz-sama is..."

Hearing those words, her father the king also sent a glance at Fritz, but his expression was dubious. He was surely trying his best not to let his feelings grace his expression, but from the subtle movements of his face, Fina could see he was dejected.

A noble hater, and the man who incited a rebellion among the academy's commoner students. And yet Aileen accepted him on his approach. He could only have a bad feeling about this.

Fina looked over the ring.

(There's only one fluffy fighter... besides master and black hair's match in the first round, I'm only interested in Millia's match. This time, whether master wins or not doesn't really matter, so just how am I supposed to enjoy my time!? ... hah, I guess I have no choice but to do some serious thinking.)

From Fina's eyes, Aileen would definitely run wild if things continued on like this. This was just a prediction, but her mother was likely reaching the ends of her patience at the fact Aileen was in love with a commoner.

Originally, she honestly wanted to welcome Rudel, who had awakened as the white knight, into the family. If that matter with Chlust hadn't happened, then not as an archduke, it would have been fine if they made Rudel king. But in that case, he would have to marry either Aileen or Fina.

King Alback had planned to marry Aileen to Rudel and Fina to Aleist. Rather than using his daughters in diplomacy, he prioritized getting a hold on the white and black knights.

But Fina was in a position opposed to her father's plan. The moment she learned of it, she acted swiftly, bringing talks of an engagement between Aileen and Aleist to the queen. The queen did have a fixation on status and bloodline, but she was unable to look down on the black knight.

Black knight was the name taken by the first king of Courtois. And looking into the records, there were accounts of techniques that closely resembled the way Aleist fought. Fina hit into that point, having the queen recommend putting Aileen with Aleist.

(Well, I doubt it's happening with my sister like that... hah, so I really have to prepare.)

To Fina, it was dangerous if Aileen didn't cut off Fritz. Her sister who was practically blessed by the heavens, the sight of her seriously backing Fritz floated in Fina's eyes. If played poorly, there was a fear that the system of nobility itself would disappear.

From Fina's point of view, nobles going away or losing power wasn't a problem. She feared the insurrections that would come in the process of the nobility's collapse. When the large power beside them showed a movement, if they continued squabbling within the country was sure to collapse. In the worst case, the nobles would turn on them and send them to the chopping block.

(I want to see fluffadise. I don't want to die.)

Expressionlessly, yet sorrowfully, Fina stared at Aileen.



The all-important first match was left to Rudel and Izumi.

In order to make this individuals' tournament a success, the academy had put in quite a bit of work. But in the end, it all came down to the competitors' performance.

The academy simply heated things up as much as they could, praying it all would end without incident.

Facing one another, Rudel and Izumi held their wooden straight sword and curved sword as they awaited the signal from the referee. They didn't have anything to say to the other. They were concentrated hard enough, they didn't need to exchange a light greeting before the match. It was something both sides understood.

And as the first match was about to begin, the hall's tensions rose as well.

After confirming the preparations were complete, the ref turned to the audience and sent a sign.

A group with large magic circles engraved on their shields started moving around the front row. As the shield knights occupied the first row, the row which was most worthy to watch a match from, a single noble drew close.

"Oy, you lot, if you're not using all of the front row, then give me a seat! Is there any meaning in keeping them? I'm sure it's some sort of magic, but don't waste our time with something meaningless!"

The young nobleman surrounded by a few followers grabbed the man who looked to lead the shield knights and interrogated him. The fact his foe had a vague knowledge of magic only made the shield knight more troubled to explain.

"So you see, this is a formation to protect the audience seats, and we have to move around to match the situation, so we have to leave them empty..."

The commanding officer was Rudel's upperclassman Vargas. He was appointed as head of the newly-formed shield knight unit, leading the force of young knights.

"Like hell a magic circle can display an effect if you move it around! Get me the guy in charge!"

“... Ah, young master.”

“Don’t call me that, Vargas! More importantly, what’s this? Are you trying to deface me?”

The one who appeared was Luecke, wearing a different robe than usual. In order to distinguish himself from the spectators, he clad himself in a white robe bearing the crest of his house. The reason Luecke was so hyped up was that this was his opportunity to unveil the knight unit he formed himself.

If this succeeded, he planned to expand it to a brigade. But now he had another reason to put even more power into the individuals’ tournament.

“huh? This person’s Vargas-san? Pleasure, I’m Lena Arses!”

The one to Luecke’s side, able to get a front row seat on the condition she kept close to Luecke, was Lena. It was Rudel’s last, long-awaited tournament, so wanting to see it with her own eyes, she had made the trek.

But troublingly enough, the seats were full. The appearance of Luecke led to the current situation.

“... You understand, don’t you, Vargas? I cannot fail here.”

“Yes, but that’s just because your crush is... eep! Understood, I’ll return to my station!!”

Hurriedly returning to his position, Vargas was pressured to flee. Lena waved her hand at Rudel, and Izumi across from him.

As Luecke turned back to the noble who spoke out, he instantly saw through his house and faction.

“Hah, this is why the Diade faction is so troublesome. It would be one thing if they were ignorant to magic, but to think they’d mouth off on half-assed knowledge.”

“Y-you’re...”

From the crest on Luecke’s robe and his looks, the man saw he was dealing with a future Archduke, and even if he was of a different faction, he faltered. The followers also proposed for their lord to pull back.

Put at a disadvantage, the nobleman turned his back and walked off. Losing interest, Luecke saw his subordinates had taken their positions, so he activated the magic.

A faint, blue dome, close to transparent, spread out to protect the audience seats. The spectators raised cheers at that magic field they had never seen before.

But more than that, Luecke...

“Luecke-san, thank you for letting me into the arena!”

Seeing Lena smile, ignoring his magic entirely as she delighted over the fact he let her in, Luecke gave a gentle smile back. He was acting completely differently to how he had treated Vargas and the noble.

“That much is nothing.”

“And hey, what’s this blue thing?”

“Hmm, this is a special field. I used markings on the shield knights to complete a magic circle. Softening impacts is a simple task, but if the shield knights move, it’s a magic that can prevent direct attacks as well.”

Perhaps it was too difficult as Lena held her head. Luecke frantically gave a simplified explanation.

“I-it’s pretty much a barrier!”

“Oh, I see. So it’s a barrier!”

Relieved that Lena had finally understood, Luecke also sent his eyes to Rudel and Izumi. During the match, Luecke would have to constantly pay mind to the positioning of the shield knights.

To summarize, this was a situation where anyone could go all out.



“Well then, let the first match... commence!”

Receiving the ref’s signal, the two took their stances, While Rudel held his one-handed sword up front, Izumi stooped down and took an iai stance.

On that stance unknown in Courtois, some restless voices sounded from the

audience seats. As Rudel hesitated on his first move, Izumi took the initiative.

As she pulled swiftly drew her sword out towards Rudel, who was out of her range, Rudel suddenly leapt back. At the place he had jumped from, the remains of a slash were carved into the ring.

Now with her wooden sword ‘unsheathed’, Izumi made a bold approach, and Rudel dodged her blows as he called over. While he showed leisure, those fast and sharp slices were making a sport of him.

“What was that right there? I couldn’t see the light of mana.”

“It’s called iai. Normally, my range is only around a few meters, but I saw your magic sword and tried imitating it.”

“I see!”

If he took distance, those invisible slices would fly his way. Rudel judged the time she stayed out of her starting posture. He concluded those shockwaves wouldn’t fly if she wasn’t in stance.

But she showed movements subtly different to what he knew. Her fighting style was the same, but culture also varied from country to country. Unlike Rudel and the others who would leap to close distance, Izumi would step in.

It wasn’t much of a difference, but those subtle discrepancies put Rudel off.

Rudel’s fighting style of cladding his sword in mana was possible for Izumi. But Izumi only activated it when it was necessary. She only used the minimum amount of mana required.

By that, she could fight a prolonged battle.

As Rudel was measuring her range, Izumi changed the way she swung her sword. It was similar to the motion she used to pull her sword in her previous stance, but this time, she didn’t pretend to resheathe it.

“Normally, you’d use the sheath of the katana as well. But a wood sword has no sheath, right? Then I need not adhere to it.”

Izumi gently smiled, but she was pretty much saying she didn’t need to take a stance. If she could project her slashes even without a sheath, then it was only natural she could do it in any stance she chose.

“That really is troubling.”

Rudel held up his left hand, commencing an attack with magic. It was an invisible attack through the magic of wind. With that, it looked as if both sides held the same conditions.

But Izumi’s shockwaves easily cut through Rudel’s wind to attack him.

“Can you quit playing around, Rudel? I’m serious.”

Seeing Izumi’s serious face, Rudel looked at the edge of his clothing that had been sliced. Without any fraying, it was cleanly cut through.

“... You better not call it underhanded.”

“I won’t.”

With those words alone, they had reached an understanding. From those around, they were already completely a couple. In the noble visitor room, Fina was infuriated within.

As Rudel decided he couldn’t win with wind, he used the earth magic Luecke had utilized the year before. Sticking his left hand into the ring, he manifested a wall to surround Izumi.

Compared to Luecke’s, it differed in strength and size.

Surrounded by walls, Izumi quietly took a stance.



“Ooh, my bro’s amazing.”

“Yeah, making one of those on the fly is considerably difficult. Strength aside, with this, he’s sealed off Izumi’s invisible slashes. It’s Rudel’s win.”

Luecke was convinced of Rudel’s victory, but Lena shook her head. As she did, her side-ponytail swayed. Turning to Luecke’s smitten face, she told him Izumi hadn’t given up.

“Not yet, he hasn’t. There’s no way Izumi-in-the-flesh-san would give up here.”

“I-Izumi in the flesh?”

Rather than the direction of the battle, Luecke was more curious about the in-the-flesh title.

Right after, the earthen wall surrounding Izumi was shredded to tatters by countless invisible slashes. The hall convinced of Rudel's victory was wrapped in voices of surprise.

It was a single instant. As fissures raced across the wall at once, Izumi appeared with her wooden sword drawn. Rudel was making a delighted face. And perhaps Izumi was also happy, having made Rudel serious.

From the audience's point of view, 'foreign women are scary', was what filled their heads.

"... See?"

On Lena's words, Luecke was impressed. He wanted to ask if she had foreseen the events that had unfolded before them, but first off, he confirmed that Izumi was more of a threat than he had imagined.

Instantly changing the placement of the high knights, He moved the knights who had only been focused on Rudel to keep them wary of Izumi's attacks as well.

(If it gets destroyed in the first round, my barrier will lose its credibility.)

Luecke prayed that the barrier wouldn't be shattered by Izumi. But he couldn't help but picture an image of her cutting it through.

Because of Lena, that high-level magic was henceforth dubbed barrier.

## Chapter 84: The Senior and the Pregnancy

In the arena, atop the round, circular ring, the man and woman faced one another.

One was Izumi, taking an iai stance, while the other was Rudel, his wood sword held low, and his left hand held out up front. While it looked like he was taking a low stance with his sword, Rudel had simply loosened the power in his right arm to concentrate on his left.

The white knight Rudel's weapon was the shield. Letting off light, the shield that could protect from all manners of attack... he prepared to use his trump card from the start.

The spectators who knew of his fight with Aleist the year before grew interested to see if Izumi could cut through that shield of light.

Izumi herself also focused her mind on a serious Rudel. After giving one laugh, Rudel's expression turned grim and his atmosphere changed as well.

Izumi changed her grip on her curved, wooden sword, keeping her eyes wide open as she unleashed her most powerful strike yet. Immediately afterwards, a horizontal line was cut into the arena wall.

Rudel couldn't defend against it. Everyone present imagined him being cut through, but Rudel had evaded into the sky. Seeing him take a large leap, the spectators with a bit of knowledge thought the battle was settled.

Rudel in the air, and Izumi taking her stance... the hasty spectators began to believe in Izumi's victory. In the air, Rudel directed his readied left hand towards the ring, his head facing to the floor in an upside-down state.

"That was a bit of a failure. Tuning it is difficult."

Recalling his prior action, Rudel found his next area to work on. When he evaded Izumi's slash, Rudel had exercised a bit of a strange means of travel.

It was something Marty devised, and a battle style later officially taken up by the dragoons. But there were few who could use it to its fullest, and at this point, it was only an emergency means of repositioning.

Seeing some baffling points in Rudel's movements, Izumi fired a few slashes to investigate. In the spectators' seats, Luecke was tempestuously crying out orders, desperate to make sure the barrier could withstand them.

At that moment, an unbelievable spectacle entered the spectators' eyes.

It was one thing for Rudel to change his posture in the air, but his trajectory also took a violent change. When they thought he had evaded the slashes, he had landed on the ring in the next instant, almost instantaneously moving from the spot.

Izumi's slashes rained through the path he had taken, but none of them were able to capture him.

"This is...!"

As Izumi tried to read ahead of his movements, Rudel's wood sword was lowing towards her. She intended to parry, but on those movements she had never anticipated, she ended up forced to catch the blow.

Rudel's heavy strike crumbling her stance, Izumi leapt back for a moment. The moment she had come in contact with him, Izumi gained a general grasp of things.

"This is magic?"

What she felt on her skin was an unnatural flow of wind. The wind swirling with Rudel at the center pushed him into the air once more.

On those movements that could no longer even be called human, the spectators couldn't even raise their voices.

Izumi undid her iai stance, holding her sword at the center of her body. She felt that a stance like iai—which amassed power into a single blow—put her at a disadvantage when it came to swift reaction. Now she pointed the tip of her blade at Rudel standing on the ring.

"That's quite a rash way you're using it."

Receiving the mutter Izumi gave once her breathing was in order, Rudel showed an even greater acceleration in his movements. To those unaccustomed, perhaps it seemed as if Rudel had appeared behind Izumi in an

instant,

Izumi turned around, but where she turned, Rudel's wood sword was gently touching her cheek. Izumi let her sword fall from her hands, falling to her knees as the ref gave a grand declaration of Rudel's victory.



After watching Rudel and Izumi's match, Luecke had noticed the secret behind Rudel's movements.

"He's crazy. Purposely having his magic explode on him, I would never do it by choice."

Having successfully maintained the special field Lena named barrier, Luecke let out a sigh of relief as he watched Rudel extend Izumi a hand.

Lena was to his side, seeking an explanation towards her brother's movements.

"Hey, hey, Luecke-san. Could I move like that too?"

"Those movements? No, I'm sure you could do it, but I wouldn't recommend it. That one's dangerous. It might look like he's brute forcing it, but actualizing that would need a precise control of magic. One wrong step and the explosion should send his body spiraling out of control."

After hearing Luecke's explanation, Lena smiled.

"Oh, so I can learn it too!"

"No, I'm telling you it's dangerous..."

"Alright, I'll do my best! Ah, Luecke-san, you're good at magic, right? Teach it to me."

When Lena grabbed Luecke's white robe in her fingertips, Luecke spoke with a straight face...

"Leave it to me, I'll make a splendid magus of you."

Nearby, Vargas who had come to discuss his next positioning, was making an inexplicable face before his employer.

While Luecke was usually expressionless, giving those around a cold

impression, when he was with Lena, he looked younger than his age. It seems he was bad with personal relations from the start, but having come so far, he was slowly improving.

But the one he was in love with was the problem. If she was a fair noble daughter it would be another thing, but the other party was Rudel's sister and a tomboy. What's more, from her status, it didn't look like his love would bear fruit.

Lena was tall in stature, just a little to go before she reached Luecke's height. Her appearance was beautiful enough, but because she wore men's clothing, if her hair wasn't long, then perhaps she could be taken as a peerless pretty boy.

(Rudel's sister is also quite something... she's thirteen, was she? Two more years then.)

Seeing Lena who would come to the academy someday, Vargas recalled the teacher camp who had come to him in tears. Thinking that the academy surely had hard times ahead of them, he wanted his employer to notice him already.

It was just around that time that the headmaster-keeping the royal family company in the noble visitors' room-felt a chill.



The next match ended safely without any greater enthusiasm than before.

It was a match between Eunius and a fifth year, but Eunius easily pinned down his victory. In a separate visitor room from the one for royalty, Eunius and Luecke's parents had come to see their own sons' hours of triumph.

But as there was an abnormal zeal this time around, the archdukes who got along like cats and dogs were placed in the same room. The other rooms were all filled with marquises and counts, and this was the only room left adequately furnished to accept an archduke.

They did seek confirmation from both houses, and the academy decided there wouldn't be a problem. But these were houses with deep-seated grudges.

Once Eunius' match ended, the Diade House Head raised a grand laugh.

"He should fire up the crowd some more. That boy needs to learn to pay mind

to his surroundings a bit..."

As truth would have it, Eunius had fought making sure not to scratch the ring. The reason was simple. If he wanted to fight Rudel as soon as possible, then the ring's repairs would get in the way.

"Hmm, then why don't you try paying mind as well? You've been hollering for a while now."

Luecke's father, Archduke Halbades, put the drink he'd been offered to his mouth as he spit out the words. The Diade House and camp glared back... the Archduke room was filled with an exceedingly tense atmosphere.

But there was some distance between the two houses, and they wouldn't break into anything. The empty seats in the center were originally supposed to be occupied by the members of the Arses House who were supposed to come. But no one had made their way to the competition.

The two archdukes found it strange. They thought the man was irritated at having a son too talented, but they couldn't think of a reason he'd show such contempt in a public space.

If he actually came, the other two archdukes may have actually had to concede defeat and kneel to that ill-natured Archduke Arses. It was strange that such a conceited man wouldn't come to see a son he could boast about.

They had heard of Rudel from their own sons. As nobles, being swept up by his proficiency would be troublesome, but looking at it as people, having good friends was a good thing. They truly lamented he was from such a problematic lineage.

"Hmm, that man is a vindictive one. Is it really so hard to accept him? He looked like a son to be proud of to me."

"You should watch your words. You might be calling him Your Majesty soon."

Archduke Halbades cautioned Archduke Diade on his words, but he had already heard of Rudel's nature from Luecke. From his point of view, he was a failure as a noble. But seeing how his son had matured, perhaps he was a good person. The archduke concluded so.

The probability of Rudel becoming king was by no means anything small. He also thought that Luecke being his friend would become a large contribution to the Halbades House in times to come.

(If his bearing as a king is enough to pull people to him, then there's no problem as long as his surroundings support him up.)

The other Archduke, Archduke Diade was, if one had to choose, a noble who idolized military might. That Rudel had obtained a dragon more powerful than ever seen before was enough for him to call Rudel his king.

Of all else, to him, the word strong was important. He sought strength as a symbol. He didn't seek for Rudel to take to the front lines. He didn't seek for him to take command.

But he wanted a king who could order his troops to fight. In that regards, what he had heard from Eunius gave Rudel a passing grade.

Perhaps it was ironic that both Archdukes had recognized him. The space in the center of the room looked terribly lonesome.



After Eunius' match, the next match was held promptly.

In Rudel's match with Izumi, the ring was left in tatters, so some time was required to repair it. And it was time for Fritz, the one who bore the hopes of the common man, to take to the stage.

In the noble visitor room of royalty, Aileen happily waved her hand at the window sill. Seeing that, both the king and queen shook their heads, while Fina dealt with the dragoons who came to report.

The ones who entered the room were Cattleya and Lilim. They had some connections with Fina, so they were appointed to inform the royal line of the security situation.

But the room's dubious air left the both of them troubled.

"What's wrong?"

As Fina sent a lifeboat to the troubled two, Cattleya gave her report. When Lilim entered, the eyes of the royal guard grew sharp. Aileen was engrossed

with Fritz, and she hadn't noticed Lilim.

"Yes, we came to report that there is nothing to report about the security in the sky..."

"Is that so. Then would you two like to watch the match as well? The headmaster is busy dealing with father and mother, so I wanted someone to provide commentary."

It wasn't as if Fina kept the two dragoons on her own selfishness. The entrance of two outsiders had let her parents regain their composure.

Fina had enough of having to divert her attention away from Aileen. After Lilim went to inform the dragoons they would be placed on guard duty temporarily, Fina felt just a little disappointed.

Having as many lovers (fluffies) by her side was what Fina wanted. If Sophina knew the real reason, she would surely call it selfish.

"But is that truly necessary? I do see some high knights present."

As Cattleya looked around, she saw some faces she had once seen among the high knights, but at this point they had transferred to the royal guard. Having returned from the outskirts only recently, Cattleya didn't have a grasp on the situation in the palace.

"It's fine. Sophina has gone into heat over mas... Rudel, and she won't explain anything to me."

Fina had tried teasing Sophina, but Sophina truly did grow flustered. As Fina didn't have any interest in battle, she didn't particularly want commentary on the battle. But Sophina's face grew redder than she had expected, so Cattleya opened her mouth.

"Eh? But isn't she married already..."

"Hold your tongue, Cattleya! ... Just don't touch that matter."

Fina's tact stuck deeply into Sophina's heart. Cattleya had been convinced that Sophina was married. While they had seen each other's faces a few times, the two had rarely spoken of anything outside of work.

When Lilim returned to the room, the air only grew worse.

Around the time Lilim returned, Fritz' match was already over. It wouldn't take any time to mend the ring, and next up was Aleist's match with Millia.

As they climbed up to the ring, the older sister Lilim felt pride as she saw how much her little sister had grown. But behind Fina, Sophina and Cattleya were persistently carrying on a woman's quarrel.



Climbing up to the ring, Aleist took a deep breath.

A head he had never felt before, and a peculiar air, he calmed his heart to make sure he wasn't swallowed in. The reason he couldn't calm down was surely because he was up against his beloved Millia.

While Aleist held a wood sword, Millia had a training bow. The arrow tips were covered in rubber, and they were made not to stick into anything. But if they hit, they really hurt.

On the appearance of the rumored black knight, the arena grew rowdy at once. Those cheers almost held enough force to shake the ring itself, making Aleist a little embarrassed.

Have I become a bit more worthy of their cheers? The thought lingered within him. But those who knew Aleist saw the scene from a different perspective.



"Oh? Mister black knight likes Ms. Elf!?"

On Lena's loud voice, the nearby spectators reacted. Perhaps happy he could answer Lena's questions, Luecke spoke of all without deceit.

"Yeah, but that elf, Millia, truth be told, Rudel is the..."

"Oy, young master! Don't tell the young lady of her brother's love affairs!"

Thinking that was going too far, Vargas went in to stop Luecke. But Luecke gave a gesture to shoo him away, and he reluctantly abided.

Where he went was Basyle, her stomach grown in size, with Izumi sitting to her side. The reason her stomach had grown was, of course...

"Will it be born soon?"

"Yes, I hope we have healthy child."

Once Izumi moved from the waiting room to the audience, she reunited with Basyle, so she sat beside her. Basyle wasn't wearing anything too revealing, so it was hard to notice her at a glance.

As Vargas approached Basyle, telling her to look after herself, the eyes gathered on him. From the contents of their conversation, it seems they had realized Vargas and Basyle were a couple.

"Dammit, when my face is better..."

"Accursed winners in life."

"Don't think it'll all be moonlit nights."

Bathed in the envious eyes of men, Vargas' shoulders fell.

"Why am I..."

When he was worried for his wife, he was showered in envy, and his employer was in love with a child seven years his younger. He was one of the people who live's had been greatly altered by Rudel.



"Hey, Aleist."

"Y-yes!"

Ever since the confession, Millia had become estranged from him. For Aleist as well, ever since that point, even if he met her, he was left in a state where he couldn't say a thing. The two were in quite an awkward relationship.

They had grown taller since they first met at the academy gates. Since then, they had both changed considerably.

Millia had transformed into a woman, and Aleist had looked at himself anew. Such was the two of them, but...

"You really are the worst."

"Eh!?"

Millia's expression was seriously filled in anger. To look at it objectively... Aleist was the lord of a harem. At the point he confessed to Millia, he was

already dating a number of women.

But with the violent characters Seli and Juju, he had already completed some considerably painful events. With a misunderstanding, he was hit hard enough to be slammed into a wall, and almost became rust on a sword.

And the other girls also boasted considerably strong personalities. Otherwise, they would have pulled away from Aleist already.

But from the eyes of those around, such a thing was irrelevant. It was unforgivable that he was surrounded by multiple women in his school days.

"Laying hands on so many women, and even trying for me... I'll have you regret it!"

"E-eeeeeeh!!? Whyyy!!?

Millia had taken a stance with her bow, so the referee nonchalantly signaled the match's start before fleeing the ring.

# Chapter 85: The Confession and the Sword Idiot

“I like you, Millia!”

“You’re saying that again!!

Wings made of light appeared on Millia’s back as she jumped high over the ring and fired off an arrow. As Aleist avoided that arrow laced with magic, it stuck deep into the stone ring.

Normally, that would be dangerous, but on top of avoiding it with ease, Aleist instinctively hit down the next one with his wooden sword. Their abilities were too far apart. What’s more, Aleist hadn’t even used the black knight’s characteristic darkness.

But this match was filled with a different enthusiasm than the one between Rudel and Izumi.

Aleist had been determined to explain away the misunderstanding. But along the way...

“I love you! These feelings aren’t a lie!”

“I’m telling you to stop it!!”

Seeing Aleist not stop his confessions even after being rejected and hated, the audience displayed different reactions as they got heated up.

A majority of the men who knew Aleist...

“Drop dead, harem bastard!”

“He’s even sinking his poison fangs into Millia-san...”

“Explode!!”

Many women...

“Wow, amazing!”

“A confession in the middle of a match!!”

“How envious!”

Aleist’s friends prayed that his confession would go well, while Aleist’s harem members let off an aura so dark everyone around them drew away.

Those unaffiliated with the academy also looked on Aleist's confession with a smile. But there were some who couldn't smile as well.



"How irritating."

"What a coincidence, I feel the same. Who's sister is that supposed to be, senpai?"

"That girl's in for it..."

Standing behind Fina, Sophina, Cattleya and Lilim were directing eyes of envy.

Sophina couldn't forgive the confession itself. The other party was the black knight, promotion assured, and from a Count House. His face was good, and he was a man with everything together. First off, he was the sort of man who would never appear at her marriage interviews.

From Cattleya's point of view, being confessed to be a knight set her maiden heart yearning. It was hard to imagine from her appearance and usual conduct, but she was the purest among these members. Even now, she was waiting for her prince on a white horse.

Last was Lilim, but she had lost her engagement over her own eyes. Since then, she had never dated a man, but her little sister was clearly receiving a confession from a splendid man. Yet she rejected it. Her attitude of continual rejection made it seem to Lilim that she had the leisure.

Turning head from those three, Fina thought...

(Ooh, how scary. How black. Well, it's interesting enough to watch. Even so, Aleist's fallen for an elf... I approve of his will for the fluff, but his timing's off.)

As Fina turned to her family, she saw her father Albach averting his face from the knights letting off a black aura behind her. Her mother seemed irritated, gripping the fan in her hand hard enough for it to let off a sound.

Her older sister Aileen seemed uninterested.

(It seems father fears a woman's scorn. As expected of the chicken who was too scared of mother to get any mistresses! I think mother's irritated that Aleist's confessing before her eyes after she devised all those talks of

engagement? My sister... is she uninterested because the other party's an elf?  
It's fun enough for me!)

While Fina thought over the troubles she had with Rudel, she considered adding some ammendments to her plan of shoving Aileen onto Aleist.

At this rate, even if Aileen and Aleist's engagement was recognized, she might demand the condition of him eliminating his fluffy mistresses.

(I can do something about mother, but the problem's my sister. Even if I alter the plan, the engagement won't be recognized... hah, I hope Fritz loses soon so she can cool her head.)

Seeing how everything her sister did seemed to go well, she determined that she wouldn't be blessed with the good fortune of Fritz losing anytime soon. If losing was enough to cool her off, she would have calmed down after his battle with Rudel.

(But Aleist, eh... that might be surprisingly nice.)

That wasn't a statement as a woman, her thoughts of how to use everything for her ambitions, was Fina's strong point.

(He isn't as popular as master with the fluffies, but the defenders could use him as a backup... ah, my fluffy dreams grow evermore!!)

... Even after thinking so much, her face was expressionless.



"I'm head over heels for you!!"

"Again!!"

When her arrows had run out, Millia challenged Aleist to close combat, but CQC had become Aleist's specialty. He avoided Millia's roundhouse kick with the minimum necessary movements.

Blood rushing to her head, Millia's grandiose kick caused her skirt to flutter wildly.

She was wearing something like tights, the sort of thing where it was fine even if her skirt was flipped. She was... but as Aleist's face went bright red,

Millia only grew angrier.

Making sure her undergarments couldn't be seen, she grew too agitated to remember she was wearing tights.

"You peeked, you pervert!"

"Y-you're wrong. I'll admit I saw. But you're not wearing..."

"Die!"

As Millia swung her bow to attack Aleist, the arena showed great excitement. As Aleist dodged with a paper-thin margin, it looked like Millia and Aleist were just having a lover's spat.

It looked like Aleist was trying to soothe an angry Millia.

Out of breath, Millia took a large flap of the wings on her back. She tried to attack to decide the match.

Originally, Millia had entered the tournament desiring a rematch with Izumi. Her loss in a class battle of times passed inspired her to apply.

For that sake, she had polished her magic, and polished an elf's special way of movement. But by Aleist's high-level harassment in the form of confessions, the blood was rushing to her head, and she wasn't able to display her usual level of ability.

It was Aleist's strategic victory... Millia was beginning to think.

But as Millia charged, Aleist didn't even try to dodge. More than that, he caught her. And he proclaimed in a loud voice.

"I-I'll definitely make you happy, so please mewwy me!"

Fitting of Aleist, he bit his tongue at the end. In a tournament under the eyes of royalty, Aleist had taken action that would become an academy legend.

"I-idiooottt!!"

Right after, Millia's scream echoed through the arena. Seeing Millia burst into tears, the referee picked an adequate time before professing Aleist's victory. But he didn't have power in the voice, he sounded somewhat reserved.

"Winner: Aleist Hardie... he won the battle, but lost the war."

Aleist held back the urge to implant his fist into the referee's face.



"Huh? So in the end, did the black knight's confession succeed?"

"Hmm, I'm not sure how to look at it... did she call him an idiot to hide her embarrassment, or because she really thinks he's an idiot... she was crying, so perhaps she holds him in surprisingly high esteem?"

Rather than the contents of Aleist and Millia's match, Luecke and Lena discussed their romance. There had been a series of matches where maintaining the barrier was simple, and Vargas could also sit back and watch the match.

"But is this... really alright? This'll come back to bite Aleist, won't it?"

The arena was cheering, but it felt like this was something that would influence Aleist's future course. Vargas let out a sigh as he noticed his superior entranced in conversation with Lena hadn't heard his words at all.

Looking at the ring, they were pulling out the stuck-in arrows and filling in the holes.

The next match weighted down on Vargas' mind. A match between Rudel and Eunius, this would be their first faceoff in the individuals' tournament.

The audience had been watching Aleist and Millia's match as a form of entertainment as they placed their expectations on the match to come. Everyone imagined Rudel and Aleist, the white and black knights facing off in the finals, but from Vargas' point of view, Eunius and his superior smitten with a young girl were monsters as well.

If he had to say, it wouldn't be strange for either to win.

He was about to call out to Luecke to confirm his position. But Luecke's face had already turned serious.

"What are you doing, Vargas! The next match is between Rudel and the muscle idiot! Get to your position at once."

"I know I'm at fault, but this feels unfair..."

Heading for his station, Vargas looked at the two facing one another on the ring.



Eunius leaned his long-sword-styled wooden sword over his shoulder, and Rudel let the wood sword in his hand hang down as they faced one another. As the hall grew rowdy, Eunius opened his mouth.

“Good grief, you’ve sure kept me waiting.”

“I definitely did keep you waiting, but this is a tournament. Even if we both take part, the probability of us clashing isn’t too high.”

Eunius gave a bitter smile at Rudel’s answer, but his expression gradually turned serious. Rudel received that look as he took a stance with his wood sword.

“I really would’ve preferred the finals. Well, beggars can’t be choosers, and this is the first time I’ve ever been able to fight you at full strength.”

Rudel offered a rebuttal to Eunius’ thoughts.

“That’s wrong. Whether it’s the first or last time, I’ve always fought at full strength.”

“... That ain’t what I meant.”

In their matchup during their second year of the fundamental curriculum, Rudel was in tatters. But now standing before Eunius’ eyes, Rudel had his clothes cut up a bit, but he wasn’t injured.

They were both in a state where they could give it their all.

When Eunius assumed a stance as well, the referee rung out his voice to declare the start of the match.

The two of them definitely heard the ref’s call, but surprisingly, neither side moved. Still in their stances, they stared at one another. Even though the match had started, they wouldn’t move.

As the spectators had hoped for an intense clash of blades, this was a bit of a killjoy.



“They’re not moving.”

Lena kept her face turned towards her brother Rudel as she called over to Luecke. To that point, Luecke had been answering all her questions, but now he was concentrating on the match, and his responses would often be vague.

“Yeah, so they’re not.”

From Lena’s eyes as well, Eunius’ abilities were exceedingly high. Rudel had told her it was too early for her to face him, and she was certain he wasn’t wrong.

But in her heart, she wished to fight.

(With the current Eunius-san, given five years, I’ll be able to catch up... but by that time, my brother and everyone else will have risen even higher. I wish I was born just a little earlier.)

After watching Rudel, Lena got around to thinking she wanted to study at the academy as soon as possible.

If she did, she would be able to make worthy rivals and compete. Lena anxiously looked forward to her enrollment at the academy in two years’ time.



The first one to move was Rudel.

Neither side had shown any movement, but when Rudel moved, their swords met at once Rudel’s vicious approach had been seen through by Eunius.

On those movements Izumi could keep up with, Eunius had anticipated them and used his wood sword to fend off all Rudel’s attacks. Their power was different from the start, and even if Eunius took Rudel’s blows, he was able to repel them.

Using his emergency movements again, as Rudel’s was blocked by Eunius’ sword, he hammed a kick into Eunius’ leg. Foreseeing it and jumping back, Eunius was grinning. But that face was too ferocious to call a smile.

“How dangerous. If I took that kick, it would’ve dulled my movements.”

"... I kicked with the intention of breaking it."

On Rudel's serious statement, Eunius felt ecstasy from the bottom of his heart. He was thankful to Rudel, who didn't show the slightest shred of holding back against him.

His movements had grown better since they past fought. He could tell he hadn't neglected to train his swordplay. As Eunius went on the offense, a dazzling light emitted from his wooden sword.

After imitating a magic sword and sublimating it, it had become a magic sword for Eunius alone. On that blades warping movements, Rudel took some distance, trying to bring the fight to a mid-range magic battle.

The numerous magics he fired from his left hand... fire and water, and wind and earth, they were all cut down before they could reach Eunius. Eunius took but a single swing, but as if the magic sword held a will of its own, it moved in a complicated manner.

Its trajectory was hard to predict, and its reach was a problem. When Eunius could predict Rudel's movements, it would be impossible to approach unscathed.

So Rudel manifested the shield of the white knight. They were around the size of a person, he produced a number of those large shields, having them float around him.

Those shields radiating light, without any hesitation, he slammed them into Eunius. With those shields boasting powerful defense coming his way, Eunius leapt into the air to evade them all.

And he lowered his sword towards Rudel who had taken some distance.

The light of his magic sword reached Rudel, who had made it to the edge of the ring. AS Rudel prepared a magic sword of his own, his wooden sword was clad in light.

He instantly blocked, but Eunius' magic sword warped. Reaching just short of Rudel's own sword, the blade slammed into the ring, destroying the ground and sending stones flying at Rudel.

In a single instant where Rudel's attention was taken, Eunius had slipped into his guard. Using the magic of wind to carry out high-speed movements, Rudel evacuated to the opposite side of the ring, but his left shoulder had already tasted blood.

"Was it too shallow? I'll cut it deeper next time."

At the smile Eunius made as he held up his sword, Rudel returned a smile of his own. Eunius was definitely a battle maniac, but Rudel was the same. By fighting strong opponents, he was the type of battle maniac who thought he could move forward.

"I'll have to refrain. It's my turn to cut deep."

The spectators who grew noisy when the match started up were now swallowing their breaths at the high level of the exchange.

# Chapter 86: the Battle Junky and the Protagonist

The intense clash of light-clad swords didn't let off the sound of wood colliding.

The ring's floor was gouged out and sliced, growing worse every time the two met. Preparing two shields around a meter in length, Rudel kept them stationed close to him.

With those, he could reduce the damage caused by the movements of Eunius' warping blade. While Rudel had been on the offense, Eunius' fierce charge put him on the defensive.

The magic sword, at times it would grow, and at times it would shrink making it impossible to judge distances. Protected by his shields, Rudel thought of carrying on an offensive with magic, but he saw himself running out of gas first.

The shields of lights... while powerful shields, they expended great amounts of mana and concentration. On the handling of those shields he had yet to grow accustomed to, Rudel understood he was being pushed back.

He used his swift wind magic movement, but as Eunius was able to see through his destination, there would usually be a magic sword waiting for him. Rudel needed to take another step or he would never reach Eunius.

While Rudel thought he was at a disadvantage, Eunius was much the same. The attacks of his magic sword were being blocked by the shields. If he didn't see through the path of Rudel's high speed movement in an instant, then that instant would decide the match.

As Rudel would fly over whenever he showed a gap, Eunius put up a desperate offensive.

In contrast to Rudel's bountiful hand, Eunius was at a loss on how to continue. Quite some time had passed since they both put out their magic swords. Eunius could only display his swordplay during the timeframe his wood sword could withstand his mana.

"Dammit! And I wanted to settle this match with the sword!"

The wood sword he gripped had been specially made. But its strength was completely insufficient to endure Eunius' powerful magic sword. It was a special item made for a single match with Rudel, and that went to show just how fixated Eunius was on this match.

The off-sensation he felt when he swung his sword grew worse, and it was just about nearing its limit.

Rudel could also tell Eunius' magic sword didn't have long left. But what Rudel held was nothing more than an average wood sword. Its limit was also closing it.

Rudel erased his shields and flooded his mana into his magic sword, launching a charge on Eunius. On that high-speed charge, Eunius reacted, but as Rudel had completely abandoned defense to close in, he was only able to block.

In the next instant, Rudel's wood sword had destroyed Eunius'. In that moment, he had put in an explosive amount of mana, aiming to destroy Eunius' weapon.

"So you aimed for it, Rudel!"

Eunius tossed aside the broken sword hilt, but Rudel's hands still gripped a wood sword. As he constantly changed the output of his sword, Rudel's blade was still going strong.

Seeing how he didn't use his high-speed movement again, Eunius could tell Rudel was also near his limit. At the sword Rudel lowered to end the match, Eunius clad his left hand in magic, putting everything he had into blocking it.

He endured the blow that, if played poorly, would likely have cost him his arm.

From Eunius' left arm came the sound of bones breaking. But Rudel's wooden sword was destroyed. In that moment of Rudel's surprised, Eunius hammered in a roundhouse kick with all his might.

Rudel leapt to soften the blow, but unable to kill the momentum, he flew and tumbled across the ring before rolling to regain his posture.



Seeing the two of them grow tattered, laughing as they faced one another, the audience raised cheers. What was truly a battle that surpassed their imaginations now unraveled before them.

At the same time, Luecke was busily ordering around his shield knights to maintain the barrier. It was fine for now, but when Eunius' magic sword snapped, they confronted a crisis where the barrier might break with it.

Sweat running down his forehead, Luecke kept a careful watch on their actions.

Lena also watched the match in seriousness.

After Izumi spotted Millia coming out of the waiting room, she got Vargas' permission to use the reserved front row and invited her.

When she appeared in the spectators' seats, the fact that everyone seemed to shout blessing for her was surely Aleist's fault.

With Basyle sitting between them, Izumi and Millia watched the match.

"Even so, Rudel-sama sure has gotten strong."

As Basyle spoke in a nostalgic tone, Izumi nodded as well. In the academy, Izumi was the one who had watched him most closely.

The Rudel who made a mortified face in his first year, and the Rudel who didn't give up in his secod year. And now the Rudel who had obtained the dragon of his dreams was before them.

"... He's been working hard all the way."

As Izumi thought back over the past five years, there was weight in the words that came from her mouth. When Rudel constantly lived his life at full force, watching him from his side truly made it look dangerous.

In truth, when he tried to obtain a dragon, he did almost lose his life.

Izumi knew that side of Rudel, and after glaring at her profile, Milla turned her eyes to look at Rudel. She knew. That Rudel had never been conscious of her.

Even now, there were times she wished their first encounter had been something a bit more decent. If only she had a bit more courage... sad as it was,

Millia had finally broken away from Rudel. To move on, she had decided in her heart.



Rudel and Eunius' match had turned to a grappling match.

Rudel wanted to use magic and attack from a distance, but his mana was close to its limit. As if neither competitor cared the slightest for their next match, they exchanged blows with all their might.

The techniques they boasted only made the match all the more ill in nature.

When it came to fighting styles, Rudel's was generally dirty. He threw sand into an opponent's eyes as if it was ingrained into his body. Avoiding that and fighting him down with proper hand-to-hand combat, Eunius fought while ignoring the fracture on his left hand.

"Oy, Rudel! You won't use that technique you showed me before!? Get a bit serious, why don't you!!"

Blessed with physique, you could also say that alone would let him defeat Rudel. Yet being able to contest with him, Rudel was also a monster. Both sides let off attacks that made their mana-strengthened bodies creak, and they endured.

"If that's what you want!"

Jumping back, Rudel activated his high-speed movement. In the space of an instant, he leapt into Eunius' bosom, touching both hands to his chest, and firing his magic with all his might.

Qigong... when he heard of such a thing from Izumi, Rudel had worked on his own to recreate it with Mana. Its level of completion had risen much higher than when he unleashed it on Fritz a few years back.

The impact pierced through Eunius' chest, its effects even felt on the wall behind him. On that intense impact, the barrier warped for a moment. It showed its fault of being weak to an unanticipated attack.

But Eunius laughed as he smacked Rudel away. Rudel rolled across the Ring again before standing with a perplexed look on his face.

"That's all you've got? The one before it got me worse..."

His outer wear that received the attack was already torn up, but Eunius' upper body was completely uninjured. It seems the magic sword he lowered on him before was a greater threat.

As a countermeasure against Rudel, Eunius chose to endure the threat he saw in the attack against Fritz... he decided to try enduring. It was a simple application of brute force, the moment he received the attack, he would guard with all his might. That's all there was to it, but as he was producing an explosive power to defend, the timing was important.

Rudel's shockwave that required accumulated force was no longer a threat to Eunius.

He cast off his tattered garments, cast them off and took a stance. It was definitely an attack he had held back on. Since he raised the output, Rudel thought it would inflict a serious injury.

But it did seem that wasn't enough for his friend before his eyes... Rudel took his own stance, and perhaps delighted, he gave a smile.

As both sides exchanged fearsome smiles, they stepped in simultaneously, meeting in an intense clash.



"Oh, how amazing. (Master's crazzy. And wait... how does he plan on beating Eunius? How does he intend to conquer that muscle idiot? It can't be an upset where Eunius will be the one fighting Aleist, right? But when he's so tattered, I get the feeling it won't even be a match.)"

The scene Fina saw from the noble visitor room was a battle heated enough to make one clench their fists until they were covered in sweat. But perhaps Fina herself wasn't interested as she thought over who would come out on top.

As things stood, compared to Rudel and Eunius, a fight where warriors of similar strength clashed, Aleist's next opponent was Fritz.

In the semi-finals, they predicted that Aleist would win. Perhaps those around were thinking similar things, as Sophina made a conflicted face.

"Sophina, who do you think will win the tournament?"

"... Aleist-sama, perhaps."

As Sophina muttered, Cattleya and Lilim beside her nodded. In the case that Eunius won, his left arm was already broken. If Rudel won, he was already out of gas. From the destroyed state of the ring, it would take some time to repair. So the problem would be how much of his stamina and mana he could recover in that time.

In contrast, Aleist showed leisure in his first match, and his next one was against Fritz. Speaking to ability, it was difficult to see Aleist losing that one.

The man himself had confessed before so many spectators, and was now regretting it in the waiting room. His face bright red, he was rolling around from the sheer embarrassment.

Cattleya touched her hand to her chin, thinking as she tried to say something, when a voice called over to Fina. It was her older sister Aileen, who had birthed some interest in Fina's conversation.

"Oh my, so you've already decided the victor of the next match? This match hasn't even ended yet."

Aileen was smiling, but she was letting off an intimidating air that went beyond her expression. She couldn't forgive the fact that Fina's group had decided on Fritz' loss.

As she looked over the three knights, perhaps it was the first time Aileen took them to mind, as her eyes grew sharp for an instant.

Meanwhile, Fina was delighted her plan had worked out.

(Whooh! With this, I've dropped the probability Sophina and the two dragoons will head over to my sister's faction!! I'll whittle them away bit by bit!!)

Fina had kept the two dragoons in want of fluff replenishment, but on these harvests beyond her expectations, she declared this match viewing session a success.



The match where both sides lacked a deciding blow was finally coming down to brute strength.

If Rudel attack with versatility, Eunius would bet on a single blow and swing around his fists. The top of the ring had been destroyed, making for terrible footing.

It was fine if they continued exchanging punches, but it was about time for them to decide the match.

As both sides leapt back to take distance, they got their breathing in order.

“Eunius, I’ll decide it with the next one.”

“Oh, what a coincidence... I’ll also be deciding it here. Regrettable as it is, I do have my next match ahead of me.”

Both believed in their victory without any doubt. They had not the slightest thought of loss. But there could only be one victor. Even if it was difficult, Eunius held the advantage on a defensive front. He was able to endure Rudel’s blows.

As Rudel stepped in first, Eunius prioritized his offense over defense. Rudel plunged himself straight forward, and he intended to greet him with his strongest blow.

He channeled magic into his fist, magic with exceedingly high destructive capabilities. Where he lowered his fist, Rudel had definitely been there, but he dodged at a paper-thin margin. In the next instant, Eunius braced his body to endure, but Rudel laughed.

“That’s no good, Eunius. That’s where you should attack.”

Grabbing that lowered arm, Rudel performed a shoulder throw on Eunius. Flying through the air, Eunius tried to roll as he slammed into the floor. But the moment he rolled, he noticed his defeat.

“Rudel!”

Sending himself into the air with wind magic, Rudel did a rapid descent straight into Eunius. By the time he noticed it, Rudel’s kick was already ready to pierce him through. Unable to dodge it, Eunius was only able to endure.

As Rudel fired that piercing kick, he put all his body's weight into his foot, and with magic... he accelerated further to pierce through Eunius' defenses.

With nowhere to run, Eunius took the brunt of Rudel's full force, cracks spreading across the entirety of the ring.

Yet Eunius managed to endure the attack that exceeded all his expectations. As a price for enduring, he was left out of mana. An intense pain assailed his body leaving him unable to even stand.

He suddenly recalled the form of Luecke standing even when he was out of mana.

(That bastard, so he endured this pain... I've got to praise him a bit for that... more importantly, I have to stand soon and get in stance. Otherwise, I'll lose.)

Eunius somehow managed to keep his consciousness from fading, but as the referee's voice declared Rudels' victory, he faded away with a smile. He had given it his all and lost. He made a satisfied face.

The arena was rocked by an enormous cheer.



Eunius was hurriedly rushed to the infirmary, while Rudel received first aid in his waiting room.

As he had a match ahead of him, Rudel had to prepare for his next fight. He couldn't quite forfeit before the king.

But it would take some time for the ring to be repaired, and Rudel had bought some valuable time. Watching the ring's repairs from their audience seats, Izumi and the others worried for Rudel.

Millia felt the disadvantage of the finals, and opened her mouth in anxiety.

"At this rate, it really will be bad. Rudel's almost out of mana, while Aleist might be able to win his way there unscathed."

Basyle stroked her enlarged stomach as she thought.

(No, you could have just put in a bit of effort. It's your fault he got here unharmed to begin with, right?)

Supporting her former employer Rudel, Basyle gazed over the swift ring repairs being carried out through magic. The way things were going, the matches would resume in less than an hour.

There had already been a break, and around, the spectators who had used the school cafeteria were beginning to return. The cafeteria was unable to accommodate all of them, so the audience was divided up. The three of them had finished their lunch first, so they were killing time in their audience seats.

"H-he definitely does have a disadvantage, but Rudel has always overturned disadvantageous situations. So I'm sure he'll be fine this time."

Izumi answered Millia as if to get herself to believe, but it was clear Rudel was at a disadvantage after a close-combat match with Eunius.

Basyle understood Izumi's feelings, but this time it was a terrible matchup. She knew the black knight was undoubtedly skilled, and she wondered how long Rudel would be able to put up a fight.

The black knight Aleist had become somewhat decent. Expecting that he wouldn't end a match in an instant before the king's eyes, she hoped both sides would fight a good fight...

But Basyle's hopes were splendidly betrayed.



As Aleist and Fritz stepped up to the mended ring, apart from the cheers, some separate jeers echoed through the arena.

Over his match with Millia, Aleist was being teased. He tried his best to concentrate on the match, focusing his attention on his opponent before his eyes.

But before the match began, Fritz opened his mouth.

"Good grief, this is why you laid-back nobles are no good. When you're at a match the royal eyes are gathered to see, to show off such a farce..."

"Ah?"

Even Aleist didn't want to be told that by the man before his eyes. His tone grew gruff. You put on a production of your own farce just a few years ago,

didn't you!? He somehow managed to swallow the words.

"It's laughable to think they'll call a knight like you the black knight. I heard it was a revelation from a goddess, but that goddess must have had knotholes for eyes."

"..."

"Combatant, speak with moderation! Now let the match commence!"

As the referee declared the match's start, Fritz took a stance with his wooden sword. Ever since he was defeated by Rudel, Aileen had hired him a personal tutor for swordplay and the martial arts.

His placement in the individuals' tournament was something he crawled up to through ability, and he had some confidence in his current self.

But just as the referee declared the start, Fritz' consciousness was blown away. The last thing he saw was the bottom of Aleist's shoe.

Right as the match started, Aleist had visited Fritz' face with a well-placed drop-kick. The kick from the needlessly high-speck Aleist instantly had Fritz flying out the hall.

"Try saying that one more time! I'll have you seeing stars again!!"

Blown off the ring, Fritz was already unconscious. Having truly ended the match in seconds, Aleist suddenly recalled his next match was with Rudel.

And the fact he planned to extend this match as long as possible... the spectators were the same, but the royal family watching from their private room were surprised by Aleist's actions as well.

"V-victor, Aleist Hardie!"

Ignoring his victory declaration, Aleist rushed over to Fritz, grabbing his lapels in both hands and shaking him back and forth. With Sakuya mocked, he had-against his better judgment-put in a serious kick. Aleist desperately tried to wake Fritz up.

"W-wake up, Fritz! We won't be able to buy time like this, dammit!!"

"Cease and desist! We do not accept any attacks against the defeated party."

As Aleist violently shook Fritz back and forth, the ref and those in charge frantically restrained him.

# Chapter 87: The Idiotic Two and Where Paths Split

“I definitely won’t accept this!”

In the noble visitor room, Aileen judged the contents of the match between Aleist and Fritz with a rough voice. Her father, the king, let out a sigh, while her mother disinterestedly told her there was no problem with the match.

“Don’t accept what? The black knight simply moved right after the match commenced... I never thought I’d ever be forced to bear witness to such an unsightly match, but the victor is the black knight. Aileen, are you certain your eyes aren’t the problem?”

The queen had grown excited during Rudel’s match with Eunius, but the instant defeat in the following match had dampened her spirits. It was clear Rudel had an even greater disadvantage against Aleist than he had in the last time they faced off in the finals.

With Aleist’s abilities, the queen doubted he would lose. Meaning she already saw the result of the final match. That’s precisely why she held some light expectations of the fight between Aleist and Fritz. If Fritz persisted here, then small as it was, she hoped a chance for Rudel would be born in the finals.

“Mother!”

“Lay off, both of you. More importantly, it’s almost the finals. Headmaster, I wish to put in a slight intermission.”

“Understood. There shall be a break before the finals.”

On the king’s orders, the headmaster informed the staff waiting outside the door that there would be an intermission. The king had shown Rudel a courtesy before the finals. Aleist also declared he wanted to buy time, so he had afforded him some extra.

As Aileen rushed out of the visitor room, some knights of the royal guard followed behind. Fina looked at the doorway her sister had left before whispering into Sophina’s ear.

The queen folded her fan, let out a sigh, and ordered the royal guard to bring

Aileen back.

“... Drag her back here before the finals. Good grief, why did she grow up to be that sort of child?”

On her mother’s complaint, Fina turned only her eyes to see her as she screamed in her heard.

(On the contrary, I’d like to know how you managed to raise two princesses this terrible!! Father, you say something to mother, you don’t have to hold it back... it’s your education that’s to blame, those are the words you’re looking for!)

Leaving her own matters on the shelf, Fina, had been laughing internally for a while at that last match, and her mother’s words only stimulated her funny bone further. If she had any expression, she would surely be tearing up as she laughed and rolled around.

(More importantly, Fritz is damn weaaak!! Getting instakilled like that, are you trying to kill me with laughter? I guess I really can’t look down on Fritz!!)



In a dimly-lit passage of the arena, Aileen grabbed one of the academy’s staff and asked for Fritz’ location. But once she learned that Fritz was bedridden in his waiting room, she issued that staff member an order.

“What? ... You want them to use real swords?”

Receiving that order from Aileen, the staff member’s mouth opened in surprise.

“It’s their final match, right? For both the black and white knights, it will be troublesome if we don’t have them fight to their fullest... you heard me, I did give the order.”

After saying only what she wanted, Aileen raced over to Fritz. If they used real swords in Rudel’s match with Eunius, then surely neither side would have gotten off lightly. The white and black knights just need to crush one another, Aileen suddenly hit upon the idea and made an order of it.

The fact the staff member she grabbed held a considerably high station was

part of Aileen's good fortune. It was almost as if anything would be granted if she wished it... all of Aileen's actions were being protected by some larger force.

Hearing that exchange from start to finish, Sophina waited for Aileen to leave before grabbing that staff member and carrying out Fina's orders.

Fina had ordered her to keep watch on her sister, Princess Aileen's actions, and Sophina never thought anything would come of it, but after seeing Aileen's conduct, she determined this was going too far.

Taking that staff member alone, Sophina made for the noble visitor room.



Holding his face as he left his waiting room, Fritz thought back over his hazy memories.

Right after he heard a voice signaling the start of the match, he had lost consciousness. Thinking that Aleist had worked some injustice, he left the waiting room he had been put to sleep in with the intent to put up a protest. Pushing aside the defender guards posted in front of his door, Fritz proceeded down the corridor.

His injuries themselves were nothing major, he was barely hurt. From before the match began, he had been strengthening his body with mana, so it didn't reach anything serious.

With unsteady feet, he walked down the passage to grasp some staff member or another. But there, he ran into Lena, who had left her seat during the intermission.

"Ah, it's the guy who got instakilled."

On Lena's words, Fritz' anger welled up.

"Wrong! That Aleist guy used some cowardly means to..."

Shaking her head, Lena told Fritz everything she had seen. After he provoked Aleist, Aleist got pissed and fired a kick right after the match began... she explained that's all there was to it.

There was no injustice, and it was a fair judgment.

"...! There's no way that's true. Rather, those clothes... you must be a noble."

"? Yeaah, I guess you could call me a noble."

Looking over the clothes Lena words, Fritz determined she was a noble. But in this dark corridor, determining someone was a noble just by looking at their clothes was impossible. Fritz had convinced himself that the girl who denied him must be a noble.

"What house!?"

"Eh? Arses."

"Hah, it's as I thought. You're tied to the worst house of all. You and Rudel, and Chlust who dropped out, you're all the same! Tormenting your people, you filthy nobles who sit back and drink the good stuff!!"

As Lena's eyes turned serious, Fritz was put on guard. Taking a stance against a younger girl was quite unadult-like of him. But even before Fritz, Lena remained at ease.

"Hey, do you think a person's name decides everything about them?"

"... What are you trying to say? And you're a person of the Arses House. A lineage of trash! Like hell you could understand the pains you put me through!"

Fritz hailed from Arses Territory, he had been tormented by Arses rule. Lena had heard of the territory's circumstances from her elder brother Rudel. She also knew her house was hated.

But while she pitied him, Lena could tell by instinct that the one the man before his eyes was rejecting was himself. Just knowing that made her have to open her mouth.

She had gained a rough idea of Fritz from Luecke. The world at large recognized him as a commoner man taken in by the princess. Hated by the nobles, the commoners treating him as their shining star of hope.

Hearing those words of justice Fritz lined up, Lena saw through what Fritz desired. For the poor, for the commoners... the true feelings of Fritz who would say it was for someone else's sake...

"It seems you intend to use everything around you to make some sort of hero

of yourself, but I'm sure you'll never be a hero."

"W-what are you saying. There's no way I could be a..."

"It's an amazing thing to work hard for another. But you're not suited to be a hero. If you don't start looking around some more, I'm sure you'll come to regret it."

It was almost as if Lena had seen into the depths of his hearts even he didn't know about, and Fritz felt fear. Still in his stance, he took a step back, a doubt born in his mind about the greater good he was about to put to mouth.

"F-for the sake of the suffering people, I..."

As Fritz wavered, Lena tried to call out. There, from the other side of the passage came the group led by the princess. As Fritz turned to the footsteps, he turned back only one to look at Lena's face. Light was pouring in from the entrance to the passage from the audience, and it looked almost as if Lena was bathed in the light. But of his own accord, Fritz made for Aileen in the dark corridor depths.

"Are you alright, Fritz-sama?"

"Yeah, sorry. I lost."

Reaching Aileen, Fritz turned again, but Lena was already gone. He felt as if he had seen a dream, and was sure it was because his head wasn't yet clear.

"... It's alright. The black knight who smeared you with shame shall definitely be..."

Pretending he didn't hear Aileen's words, Fritz let her lead him as he proceeded down into the darkness.



The final match was the battle between white and black knight mostly everyone had been expecting.

In the audience, Eunius-who had fled as soon as his treatment was over-sat alongside a nurse. The doctors already knew he would run away, so he ordered the nurse to accompany him when he did.

As both sides climbed up to the ring, cheers rose through the arena again. As expected of the finals, more spectators let themselves be heard than in the first match.

Such was the finals, but Eunius' eyes were drawn towards a certain something. Atop the ring, a wide variety of weapons had been prepared.

"Oy, don't screw with me..."

Luecke agreed with Eunius' surprise.

"Yeah, this is madness. If they let Rudel and Aleist hold weapons, in the worst case, one of them might die..."

Luecke criticized the academy's decision in using weapons during the finals, but it was there Eunius' opinion differed.

"They didn't bring them out for me! Even if it's dulled, as long as it's iron, I would've been able to keep it a contest of swordplay to the end..."

Seeing Eunius truly vexed, Luecke made an incomprehensive face. There, Lena returned from her break and reunited with them.

"Huh? Why's Eunius-san here? He's holding his head, but is he alright?"

Those around could only feel fed up as Eunius showed serious envy for Aleist. Having real swords in a match was nothing but a hazard.

As Izumi stared at Rudel in worry, the referee loudly declared the special rules of the finals.

'As a special exception, the use of dulled weapons is permitted in this final round. But this is something entrusted to the competitors, and it is not an obligation...'

It seems they were leaving it up to Rudel and Aleist's wills, but Izumi and Basyle had a bad feeling about this. Millia thought they wouldn't take up dangerous weapons if it was left up to the competitors.

But they were dealing with Rudel. After hearing that explanation, he delightfully set into choosing a weapon. As if lured in, Aleist also selected a weapon.

"H-hey, wait, are they idiots!? Even if they're dulled, if they attack each other with lumps of iron, it wouldn't be strange if one of them fell dead!"

Millia stood from her seat and cried out, but Izumi and Basyle simply sighed, their expectations on the mark. As expected of my big brother, Lena sent some eyes of admiration.

As Millia cried out, Eunius with bandages wrapped all over his body gave a careful explanation.

"It's not really a problem. And that Rudel, he can already split rocks with a wooden sword, you know. He was seriously cutting at me and all, and if they're using iron, perhaps it won't break into a fist fight this time. Hah, how envious."

"Good grief, I cannot understand the actions of you muscle heads."

Luecke made a tired face, but he didn't even show the slightest intent to stop them. More than that, he was looking at Lena's delight. Millia seriously held her head, wondering if she was the strange one.

But once Eunius saw Aleist pick out two swords, he stood and cried out. Luecke's expression was also filling with anger.

"That idiot!!"



"Alright, I'm going with this sword and shield."

"Eh? You've already decided... then I'll go with this sword... and this one too."

As Rudel picked out a sword and a shield, Aleist took out two swords. Truth be told he had only ever played around with a two sword style, but he remembered how the documents said the black knight used two swords.

Without any particular meaning, he took a two sworded stance.

"... Aleist, you can use two swords?"

"Perhaps. Did you always carry a shield?"

Rudel had received a shield from the boar, so he had studied how to use one. He was still immature, but he could use it considerably well. But Aleist had chosen his weapons to satisfy his curiosity.

His curiosity and the debt he felt to Rudel made him take up two swords. He could tell there were bandages wrapped under his clothing, and there was no saying how far his mana had recovered. If only I'd bought a bit more time, Aleist thought as he chose a style where he couldn't go all out.

"... No, you can do what you want. It's nothing for me to stick my mouth into."

Shaking his head, Rudel took his weapon and headed for the center of the ring. Aleist also took his two blades and made for the center.

The two faced one another, but seeing Aleist's expression wasn't the best, Rudel called over.

"What's wrong? Are you unsatisfied with me as your opponent?"

"N-no... but this feels too cowardly or how should I put it... if only I bought you a bit more time..."

Unlike Rudel, beaten all over his body, Aleist's condition was close to perfect. If they were to face each other like this, the outcome was clear... Aleist didn't want to fight like this.

"You were mindful of that? Then I hope you'll let me have my say. Aleist, keeping the king waiting is disrespectful. You don't need to buy time."

"B-but there's no way you'd accept it!"

"Accept? Of course I will. I'm more thankful than anything. I was blessed with an opportunity to fight Izumi, and I fought Eunius with all my might. And finally, I get to fight you. What part am I to complain about? I'd be more saddened if you didn't go all out."

As Rudel said that with an innocent smile, Aleist gave a dry laugh. He chucked the sword in his left hand outside of the ring.

"I don't have to hold back, right?"

"Aleist, I think there's something wrong about holding back before royalty."

Aleist's eyes turned serious as he took a stance with his dulled sword. Rudel pointed the left half of his body forwards, taking a stance with his shield at the front.

"Henceforth, the finals shall commence!!"

Right after he gave the signal, the referee fled the ring at full speed. After leaving the ring, he collected the sword that had been cast aside before watching over the match from a safe distance.

Right after the starting signal, Rudel and Aleist stepped in, their weapons shedding sparks as they met in a violent clash.

The finals had begun, and the two of them were unveiling a match to surpass the story.

## Chapter 88: The Decision and Family

The intense clash of shield and sword, the sparks scattered affording the arena a tension it hadn't felt in any of the matches to come before.

Though imperfect, the iron weapons gave off different impressions than the wood swords. The sound and sparks they produced whenever they met, and the screams that started coming in from the audience.

After finishing their practice exercise to test out that different sensation, both sides took distance at once. Those swords had been dulled, but after they had met so many times, the chipping gave them saw-like edges. Aleist's sword was in an especially terrible state.

In the single portion of the ring they had fought, the scars of their slashes remained.

Wiping the sweat off his face with the sleeve of his left arm, Aleist regripped his sword. Even now, he showed Rudel a joking leisure, but even if they were dulled blades, the man himself wasn't used to the sensation of being assailed by metal.

"You've gotten quite good at using your shield. Did you really just start last year?"

"No, I had been learning the shield from the start. I thought I'd never have the chance to use one, so I stopped part-way... but the boar prepared me a shield, see?"

"The boar, you mean... well, I did hear this and that."

Aleist had heard Rudel's armor had been made with the boar's tusk, and he heard that after that, the boar himself had changed shape for Rudel. His uncouth armor, thanks to the boar, had become something worthy of the white dragoon...

"Ah, by the way, both my eyes are the bird's magic eyes."

"What's that, I want it!"

Once they finished their jest, Rudel held out his left hand and fired magic. While he meant it as a diversion, a number of fireballs that wouldn't leave on in any healthy state flew at a high velocity.

Aleist avoided them all with his enhanced gait. As those fireballs hit the wall, they raised grand explosions, but the barrier was still maintained.

Hit by the blast wind from behind, Aleist's stance was put off just a bit, and Rudel used that opportunity to move at once. Conducting high-speed movement with wind magic, he rushed right at Aleist.

But Aleist was the black knight. Dark matter in the shape of spears extended from his shadows, sealing off Rudel's movement.

From Aleist's left hand as well, he used his mana pool that could be called bottomless to fire a none-too-frugal stream of magic. Rudel had to economize his mana, but Aleist had an inexhaustible supply, eliminating the need entirely. In his five years at the academy, Aleist had grown as well.

While he fell short of Rudel and Luecke, he excelled in the use of magic.

For the masses of intermediate magic coming at him, Rudel activated the shield on his left hand to manifest his shield of light and block them all. But a mid-range battle of magic put Rudel at a disadvantage. Short on mana, a decisive confrontation was most desirable.

Aleist would win out in a battle of attrition.

"Good grief, in the past, I would've used advanced magic here to make an opening!"

Rudel entered high-speed movement again, and Aleist used his shadow to manifest spears around him. For in Rudel's approach, the spears in his path would be destroyed.

As he thought, the spears on Aleist's left side were destroyed by Rudel, and shattered, the spears dissolved before fading away in the end. But the moment he readied himself, the spears stopped breaking, and Aleist lost sight of Rudel.



In the noble visitor room, Cattleya and Lilim could just barely follow Rudel

with their eyes. Sophina was confused by that unfamiliar fighting style.

It was called an indispensable skill for a dragoon, but it was supposed to be an emergency magic one used when they fell off their dragon.

As Lilim had her elven wings, she hadn't even learned the techniques. Perhaps you could call it a magic to fly through the sky singlehandedly; by compressing and exploding wind one could change direction and soften falls, or so they had learned. Taking those factors into account, it really was unnecessary for an elf.

But seeing Rudel use the essentials of that technique before their eyes, they couldn't bring themselves to call it an emergency measure.

Seeing the surprise of those three, Fina's interest was piqued. She posed the question.

"What sort of magic is that?"

Sophina shook her head unknowingly, so she directed her eyes to the two dragons standing beside her. Cattleya to Sophina's side gave a simple explanation.

"... It's similar to a magic that's been called a dragoon's essentials. It's an emergency magic, but I've never heard of it being used like that."

As Lilim nodded as well, Fina thought back to Marty's dragon. She remembered that Rudel had learned techniques apart from petting, but it wasn't Fina's duty to remember any non-petting skill in detail.

"Is it the magic he was practicing back then? (Even so master ain't human)."

"Back then?"

Lilim bit onto Fina's words. The dragoons hadn't been informed of the events that transpired in the dragons' dwellings.

"Come to think of it, he was practicing something over the lake."

Sophina recalled the scene of Rudel's practice, but she never thought she would be seeing the fruits of that training before her eyes.

"Yes, thinking back on it now, that was quite a fun trip, Sophina... (Oh, the eyes of the two dragoons grew sharp! Now I just have to remind Sophina of..."

well, I guess now's not a good time.)"

Even Fina showed prudence, but Sophina's face hung face had already turned red. On that reaction, for every adult that understood something happened, there were some who would misunderstand.

"... Hey, duty shirking high knight, what happened?"

On Cattleya's cold words, Lilim joined in as well.

"I'd definitely like to hear. If the princess was present, then wouldn't this be a serious affair?"

"W-what are you talking about! There was nothing indecent! Just some lotion and massages..."

They were unfamiliar words, but Lilim immediately understood it related to Rudel's petting. Turning her eyes to Rudel on the ring, she felt dread at the knowledge he had obtained yet another mysterious technique

But Cattleya alone was different. Next to her excited senpai, she breathed a sigh as some unfamiliar words came out again.

"You mean to say there's something even stronger than lotion!?"

"No, senpai... by massage, do you mean shoulder rubbing or something? No matter how you look at it, you're getting too worked up."

Cattleya still made light of Rudel's petting. While Fina looked at her in intrigue, inside she looked down on her. She has yet to understand.

Being accused of shirking work, Sophina looked at Cattleya, certain that she didn't understand the terror of Rudel. Directing a meaningful smile, she offered a warning.

"Cattleya, you too shall experience it someday... and there's no going back."

"That's right, Cattleya, you'll see a world you've never even dreamed up."

Even Lilim joined Sophina, making a similar smile full of meaning. Fina was also looked at Cattleya, and receiving those three stares, Cattleya mulled again.

(S-seriously, what is this!!?)



By the time Aleist caught sight of Rudel again, a shield of light had manifested above him.

Using a shield to crush Aleist from above was the plan Rudel thought up. Putting his spears back into his shadow, Aleist made a large amount of arms protrude from it.

Those black arms that extended to restrain Rudel's giant shield disappeared as they touched it as if melting away from heat.

"This is a bit...!"

Aleist wanted to flee from the spot, but his left hand was held out to control his mana. If he moved, his control would become difficult, and he'd be crushed too easily.

He produced hand after hand to resist, lowering the speed of the rapid-falling shield. On the contrary, Aleist slowly attained the force to push it back, but against Rudel, he had ended up using too much of his power as a black knight.

A black magic flowed through his body, trying to take over his head again.

Rudel on the other side of the shield was the same. A radiant mana overflowing, just like the year before, he felt something was taking over his mind to defeat the black knight... to defeat Aleist.

"This again..."

Erasing his shield, Rudel moved to the end of the ring. Aleist emitted a large flow of mana as he writhed in pain.

The powers of these two had yet to be fully understood, but their sheer magnitudes made them difficult to control.

Rudel closed his eyes, directing his consciousness towards the power in his chest. An existence trying to squeeze his power out was entreating him to defeat the black knight before his eyes.

For just an instant, Sakuya's words revived in his head. The face of the goddess who told him to be the strongest... there was no way he could show her that shameful form again, Rudel decided in his heart.

Opening his eyes, Rudel shouted from the bottom of his heart. Forcefully

mustering up his willpower, Rudel subdued the strength of the white knight.

“If you’re my power, then shut up and obey me!!”

The overflowing mana emitting from his body stopped, and this time, as if to cover him, a line of light floated a few centimeters from his body.

An armor of white symbols formed to cover Rudel’s body. Before his eyes, Aleist fell to his knees and held his head in pain.

And to Aleist, Rudel called out.



Taken in by the darkness, Aleist was unable to use his willpower to subdue the black knight as Rudel had.

His heart gradually eaten into, Aleist was brought back to memories of a distant past.

‘What are you looking at, trash.’

‘He should just die already.’

‘Hah? Confessing? Are you making fun of me? Stop it, you’re making me laugh.’

“Hah, hah, stop it already.”

The memories before Aleist was born as Aleist, they were coming back vividly. The wounds of his heart he had forgotten called back a pain of old.

The memories from when he thought someone like him was unnecessary ate into Aleist.

“Yeah, that’s right. It’s because I reincarnated into this world that the story went awry. If only I wasn’t there...”

As Aleist shed tears and denied himself, a black shadow was approaching his back. To swallow Aleist whole, the shadow opened its large mouth, but there he heard Rudel’s voice.

‘What are you doing, Aleist!? You plan to abandon your match with me!?’

The shadow on Aleist’s back, before the power of the white light shedding light into Aleist’s heard, it faded away. But even now, Aleist couldn’t stand.

“B-but...”

'Very well! If you're not getting up, I'll just have to smack you awake.'

"Eh?"

In the next instant, Aleist was sent flying, forcefully dragging him back to reality. Even now, his body let off a black mana, but his mind alone was brought back to the world. Through his forceful awakening, he felt as if he was still seeing a dream.

The jeers he received in his past life were still ringing through his ears.

'I really don't want to be in the same class as him.'

'Having no friends? Isn't he done-for as a human?'

'When he's just a disgusting otaku...'

As Aleist clutched his chest in pain, Rudel standing before his eyes seemed radiant. He was letting off light, and besides a physical light, Rudel's unwavering way of life was blinding.

As Aleist lay face up on the ring, he began giving up. He would never win. Swallowed by the power of the black knight, the weakness of his own heart was turning on him.

But from around came cheers for Aleist.

"Stand up, Aleist! Are you alright, losing like that!?"

"Millia's watching you know!"

"Show Rudel how strong you are!"

The voices of his friends. Having obtained the first existences he could ever call friends after coming to the academy, Aleist raised his torso.

"Aleist-sama, you can still stand, can't you!"

"If you're a knight, then stand! And you call yourself the black knight!?"

"Aleist, don't lose to Rudel!"

"D-do your best, senpai!"

"If it's you, Aleist-san, I'm sure you can win!"

Next, Aleist's harem members raised their voices. Despite the bitter smile on his face, Aleist extended his hand to his knees, readying himself to stand.

He suddenly recalled the face of a girl he admired in the past. Like Aleist, she

was a girl who didn't fit in with her surroundings. He remembered talking to her a few times, and he remembered she had never made fun of him.

(I see, so Millia resembled her...)

By vividly recalling what had grown hazy, Aleist was able to know why he had fallen for Millia.

(How pitiful... dragging on the past for twenty whole years...)

Once again, Aleist heard the jeers stabbing into his heart, but he ignored them all. He turned his ears to the voices of the reality.

He stopped emitting his black mana, and just like Rudel, a black, lightly-glowing insignia covered his body. As he stood, his form was a color swap of Rudel's.

If Rudel was light, then Aleist was shadow... it was a scene that made it look like that.

"You're finally up, Aleist."

"I'm sorry, I took some time... you hit me too hard."

"We're in the middle of a match. You should think of it as my mercy that I didn't land the final blow."

"Yeah, that's right. Then we'll have to go all out from now on."

"Don't be stupid! I was going all out from the start!!"

The two of them faced each other once more, readying their weapons.



With the destructive power that increased as the match carried on, Luecke was troubled to respond.

The barrier's application was still experimental. As Rudel and Aleist suddenly increased in output, Luecke was desperately trying to endure it.

Otherwise, the arena would have already been destroyed.

"Young master, this is bad! The men need some rest!"

"Don't call me that, Vargas! More importantly, we're changing formation."

Hurry and gather personnel at the indicated points!"

Opposing the two trying to destroy the barrier, Luecke put all his might to maintaining it. While he didn't have a match, maintaining the barrier through all matches put a considerable burden on Luecke.

While he definitely wanted to show the competence of the Halbades House, more than that, Luecke wanted to prepare a place for his friends to fight.

To grant his friends' wishes, Luecke had taken on a role that few would evaluate. Looking at Luecke from the side, Lena offered a proposal.

"Luecke-san, Luecke-san."

"W-what?"

Luecke was too busy to deal with her, and as he let off a colder air than usual, Lena pointed at the barrier's roof.



Gaining control of their white and black knight powers and using them, the intensity of their battle increased.

In contrast to the several hundred black snakes Aleist called from his shadow, Rudel put out his shield of light to contain them. If the two grew close enough, the swords in their hands or their fists would fly, and Aleist would get in a kick.

Atop the ring where they had given up on long-range combat, the match had already grown impossible to follow. Aleist's black shadow and Rudel's radiant light got in the way, and the spectators couldn't see what was going on.

Rudel closed in and smacked his shield into Aleist. His right-hand sword was coiled by a snake, and he couldn't use it. Aleist had been hit around by the shield a few times now, and after redirecting it with the hilt of his sword to soften the impact, he visited Rudel with a kick.

As that sharp kick entered Rudel's stomach, he made a slight expression of anguish. But Rudel unhand his right hand's sword, hammering his fist into Aleist.

As Aleist flew, Rudel followed at a high speed. But a large number of snakes wrapped around Rudel's body, getting in the way of his movement.

He emitted mana from his body to brush away the snakes, but by that time, Aleist had recovered his stance. A black lightning took residence in Aleist's sword, forming a magic sword.

"This lighting magic sword was always the most troublesome one."

Taking a stance with his sword, Aleist was sure that metal would be able to endure more than wood. From the start, his output was at the maximum.

In contrast, Rudel had light in his shield, and around him, he made a great many more shields. The magic sword imbued with the magic of lightning destroyed a number of shields with just a touch.

On top of that, Rudel who had been enhancing his body with magic, felt a numbness in his body.

"That one was your specialty. I never thought you'd polish it to such an extent."

Perhaps because Aleist was concentrating, the snakes and spears returned to his shadows. Rudel avoided Aleist's attack as he picked up his own fallen sword.

As light filled Rudel's sword, it took the form of a magic sword. But this time, it was clad in a pale flame. As the sword clad in flames that had a light tint of blue met with Aleist's sword, Rudel felt numb, while Aleist took some distance, surprised by the heat.

"Hot!"

As Aleist jumped back, he protruded spears from his shadow. Among them, a few arms were mixed in to capture Rudel.

All of them were burned away by a swing of Rudel's sword.

"Haha, you really are inhuman, Rudel."

"And you're quite the rude one. I'm sorry to betray your expectations, but I'm human."

Both were reaching their bodies limits, their symbols on the verge of fading away. Rough in breath, they looked as if they'd collapse at any moment, but they were laughing.

Rudel compressed his magic sword, a sword of blinding light manifesting in his right hand, and in his left a similar shield manifested. What was once a simple mass of iron now let off a divine light.

Aleist also sublimated his sword. He could have just waited for Rudel to run out of gas, but that was something Aleist himself couldn't accept. He was up against a foe he needed to meet head-on and attain victory.

"Rudel, I always wanted someone to recognize me. But for you alone, I'll force you to recognize me!!"

On Aleist's words as he stepped in, Rudel returned no words in response. He simply brandished his blade. Aleist's sword was taken by Rudel's shield, but Rudel's sword was wound in Aleist's shadows.

That sword that was wrapped in that rubbery darkness had its heat stolen away in an instant. Aleist had imbued his shadow with the attribute of water. It was the moment his last-ditch effort had proved successful.

But at the same time, Aleist's sword lost to Rudel's shield and shattered. Aleist's mana had forced his sword of iron to its limit.

Both swords had been sealed, and everyone could feel Aleist's disadvantage. Rudel who still had his shield looked like he would come out on top.

Casting aside his sword, Rudel slammed his fist into Aleist. Reacting to the motion, Aleist bent his body forward to avoid the punch.

In his stooped-over position, Aleist aimed at Rudel's jaw and fired off a kick. Rudel blocked with his left arm, but the impact tore the belt affixing his shield to his arm, sending it flying off.

As Rudel lost the initiative, Aleist tried to trip Rudel up, executing an axe kick as he stood. Rudel rolled to dodge, having a bad premonition of the dull pain he felt in his left arm.

"That's a tiger tribe technique. I remember this pain."

"Yeah, it's a technique executed with nothing but body strengthening. I really went through some troubles to learn it."

In the past, because of Rudel, Aleist had been abducted and trained by the

tiger tribe. A few years ago, he had thought of it as hell, but now that he was fighting Rudel like this, he was thankful.

The wall that couldn't be overcome with talent alone had been surpassed with the tiger tribe. That combat training, and the techniques he learned from those scary-faced delinquent tigers.

Aleist had once been too afraid to use his power to its fullest, but now he could use it adequately. It was the first time he felt the sway of his own matured power.

Rudel took a stance with his fists, his mouth laughing. Aleist was taken aback, but perhaps Rudel was delighted, as he ignored the pain in his left arm and sent out a fist.

"That's right! I want to fight you at your best! This is completely different from back then; fighting a serious you!!"

Rudel's rush was properly answered.

"Y-you battle junkie!!"

But perhaps scared of Rudel's smile, he was slightly teary.

With the high-speed movement Rudel occasionally mixed in, and the fight's duration, Aleist was beginning to fall back. If it was a fair-and-square fight, perhaps Aleist held the advantage. But whether it be swordplay or magic, the match was a battle where anything goes.

It was the sort of rule that allowed Rudel to use his strength to the fullest. No matter the field, Rudel was unable to be first, but he could take second place. He was the multi-purpose type who could perform on any sort of battlefield.

In contrast, Aleist was also multi-purpose, but he was cut from different stuff. While Rudel would fight risking his life, Aleist would fight to protect his own. It was clear who held the greed to triumph in a battle against a strong foe.

Aleist who had relied on his cheats held a different base. Even if he had reformed, what he had built up in a few years was different from Rudel.

Perhaps the winner had been decided the moment Rudel set foot into Aleist's domain. The same territory called the white and black knights...

As Rudel's right hand stuck a blow into Aleist's stomach, the shockwave assailed him. The light of the black symbols crumbled, and Aleist was blown a large distance.

At the same time, Rudel's white symbols disappeared from a lack of mana.

Rudel was still on his feet, looking at Aleist who was trying to stand. Even if he tried to pursue, his body wouldn't move. Even in that state, Rudel's greatest desire was for Aleist to stand. The two no longer had the power to fight, but their willpower maintained their consciousness.

"Hah, hah, this really is the worst. I should've trained more... I should've... I should've... why did I have to notice so late..."

If he had noticed it sooner, Aleist could have obtained powers far greater than what he possessed. He had made light of the world as a game, but now he mourned all the time he had spent in waste. He was irritated with himself. But obtaining strength and maturing were separate problems. As he bit back his vexation and tried to stand, Aleist could see the winner.

Rudel's eyes as he looked at him were pleading for him to stand. Having come so far, whether he stood or not held no meaning to the result. But Aleist wanted to stand.

(At least let me act cool at the end. I really was an idiot, but at the very least, I can put on airs before Rudel. This guy alone, I want Rudel alone to recognize me!)

Whipping his immobile body to motion, Aleist tried to stand when he heard a nostalgic voice, feeling a warmth on his back and limbs. As if four people were supporting him up, he lifted his body he could no longer put power into.

'Look, your friend's waiting for you. You can't keep him waiting.'  
'That's good, as expected of our child. Our pride and joy...

The nostalgic voices belonged to the parents of a life gone by, voices he was no longer able to hear. Aleist felt tears on his face, and as he stood, he could hear the applause.

Making sure the referee heard, Aleist's tears wouldn't stop as he accepted his defeat with a shaking voice.

"I-it's my loss... The winner is Rudel!"

The ref heard Aleist's voice, and once he climbed up to the ring, he gave a grand proclamation of Rudel's victory. The evening had already dyed the sky in orange, and the spectators showered the two in a magnificent applause.

Right after the referee declared the outcome, the two of them fell unconscious at once.



Letting go of his consciousness, Aleist thought back to the familiar voices he had heard at the end.

The forms of his parents floated up in the darkness. While their faces were smiling, they looked somewhat miserable.

"Ah, is this a dream? Goodness me, for me to suddenly feel homesick after coming this far..."

People continued appearing from the darkness. His brother, and his classmate who resembled his beloved Millia. His parents opened their mouths. First was his father.

'You've got to treasure your new parents. And I'm sorry I never noticed. I'm really sorry for being such a no-good parent...'

Shedding tears, Aleist tried to call out to his father. But his mother held up a hand, shedding her own tears before the changed form of her son.

'You didn't have to force yourself to endure it all... you really did good, holding out to the end. But it's alright now. You've got a lot of friends, and a lot of girlfriends... you've got to make them happy.'

He nodded in tears, and this time, his little brother bashfully scratched his head.

'... I'll do something about mom and pops. So bro, you have to do a proper job this time. Don't cause too much trouble.'

Aleist's voice wouldn't come out for his odious brother. He nodded and wiped his tears. And finally...

'I should've properly told you. I'm sorry. When you talked to me, I really was happy. I was always bad at talking with people, and it often turned awkward, but... thank you.'

As his family disappeared into the darkness, Aleist reached out his hand and was about to chase after. But he stopped. He held up his extended hand to wave them off with a smile.

(What am I doing, remembering my family at this point? Am I to show such a pitiful sight to my family and that girl who worried for me so? Keep it strong to the end, Aleist!)

Shouting at himself, Aleist tried to give them some peace of mind. Even if it was just a dream, perhaps it was precisely because it was a dream that he could muster his courage.

He cried as he made a smile, and he knew it was surely a strange face he made. But he wanted to act strong.

"I'm the one who should say sorry! I really am thankful... thank you for everything!!"

Even if it was a dream, Aleist was happy he could meet his family and that girl. He got the feeling he had found proof that he wasn't alone in that world either.

When Aleist regained consciousness, he thought he had seen a good dream. But the voice and warmth he felt in the match definitely remained in his memory. He thought he had gone through quite a peculiar expression, but he remembered he had already gone through the impossible experience of reincarnation.

He suddenly realized he had grown quite accustomed to this world, and that was a laugh.

But from the infirmary bed he had been carried to, as per usual, he could see the Three Lords lay asleep on their beds. Rudel had the window bed, and to his side, Aleist, Luecke, then Eunius in that order.

Luecke had run out of mana maintaining the barrier during Rudel and Aleist's battle. He lay with a considerably pained look on his face.

Everyone apart from Luecke was in bandages, the rhythm of sleepers' breath filling the moonlit room.

"Ah, so it ended as usual... well, that's not bad at all."

Lying on his bed once more, Aleist closed his eyes and fell asleep once more. He didn't yet know that some noisy days were to start tomorrow.

## Chapter 89: Extra - Surpass Marty 8

Splendidly updating his infirmary hospitalization records, Rudel gazed out the window of the sickroom.

The sons of the Three Lords were all gathered in that extravagant sickroom, and Aleist was there as well. There were many who ruined their health in this individuals' tournament that was on a different scale than ever before, and securing sickrooms had become a trial, so he had been pushed in.

The four of them had suffered heavy injury and mana loss and were still undergoing treatment. But there was no way they would keep quiet...

"Please mewwy me!"

"Hmm, that one was quite close."

"Give it a rest already, you bastards!"

His face bright red, Aleist glared at Eunius and Luecke lying in the beds beside him, half in tears.

They were teasing him over his unprecedented confession in the middle of a match. Luecke graded Eunius' impression, and that same exchange had been repeated a number of times.

The individuals' tournament had concluded, and with the load off their shoulders, everyone was in a lax state. The academy was busy cleaning up after the event, but the four who had been hospitalized had nothing but free time on their hands.

In that case, it was only natural they teased the subject of conversation. Eunius laughed as he continued teasing Aleist in the bed across from Luecke.

"No, no, we're really praising you here. On top of soiling a sacred tournament, when the royal line was bringing up talks of engagement, you boldly professed love before them... I'll be using this joke for the rest of your life."

"You're just mocking me after all! I-I couldn't help it. If I didn't resolve the misunderstanding, I'd never be able to move forwards..."

Luecke denied Aleist's excuse with a straight face.

"Misunderstanding? The talks of your engagement to those five have been going smoothly, and when there are even talks of your marriage to Princess Aileen, you call it a misunderstanding? Aren't you misunderstanding what it means to be engaged? Rudel, you tell him something too."

As Luecke waved the conversation towards him, all eyes gathered on Rudel.

"... Engagement is a problem between Aleist and his fiancé(s), but I do get the feeling he has a few too many. If he keeps increasing them like this, he'll be in the double digits in a few years. Aleist, look out for your body. Speaking seriously, there are loads of knights who've ruined themselves with women."

Rather than knights, in this case, they were nobles. Once their life in the academy was over, the students would be treated as adults. Naturally, the nobles would be married through talks between houses. Among Counts like Aleist, there really were many cases where an earnest young man was swallowed up by a woman.

While it was a different case, Rudel's father surrounded himself with women, and he wouldn't do any work. Among the four gathered, he was the one who understood best what result that would bring in.

"W-what are you talking about!? M-Millia is my one and only..."

As Aleist mumbled, Eunius grinned as he muttered he heard something interesting.

"Then if Millia's all you want, cut off the others. You want me to put in a word?"

On Eunius' teasing words, Aleist's face went pale as he screamed for him to stop. His serious face somewhat surprised Luecke and Eunius.

"Seriously, stop it! Those girls, well... t-their expressions of love are downright abnormal. When they act as if it's only natural I get cut up or smacked, if I bring up talks of breaking up, there's no telling what they'll..."

The actions he could laugh off when he played the game, in reality, they were no laughing matter. Aleist had experienced them with his body. Being smacked to hide their embarrassment, and being smashed through walls, he shook as he recalled the true terror he felt.

"Well, I get that you have it hard, but you better take responsibility. Izumi told me that not taking responsibility is the worst thing a man can do."

As Aleist cowered, Rudel told him what Izumi had said. But from Aleist's point of view, he had suddenly received five wives. He looked at Rudel's freedom with envy.

"You say responsibility, but can't you say that because you don't have any engagements? If you had a violent girlfriend, I don't think you'd be able to say something like that."

"Really? Marty-sama's girlfriend's expressions of love were extreme, but he overcame them, apparently."

"Marty's the petting guy, right? I get the feeling he'd love his dragon over his wife."

The picture Aleist's mind drew of Marty was that of an oddball who loved dragons more than his family. Luecke thought the same.

"Right. I must offer the same opinion as Aleist. Looking through the book, there wasn't a single mention of his family, but there was a lengthy declaration of love for a dragon."

As Luecke made a tired face, Eunius shook his head to say he couldn't understand it. But there, Rudel informed them of a surprising new fact.

"... What are you talking about? Marty-sama's girlfriend was the water dragon 'Mystith'. At first, she would smack water balls into him to hide her embarrassment, but through mastering petting, at the end, she..."

"Wait a second! Then what's that, this Marty guy was never married?"

Eunius stopped Rudel, confirming what had to be asked. Dragoons were Courtois' elites, and a target of aspiration.

Even knights of common origin were often welcomed into noble houses. The only reason one wouldn't marry lay in the individual.

"? No, he was married. There was Mystith-sama, and... who was it again? The name isn't coming out, but I get the feeling he was married."

Rudel had once seriously investigated into Marty, but Marty's family was

already one of the past, and he couldn't find much detail about his descendants. And Rudel was on the more knowledgeable side.

"Isn't that strange!? A marriage between a dragon and a human? Then he couldn't have children, right? And isn't Marty's treatment of his human wife just terrible?"

As Aleist held his head, Rudel made gentle eyes as he gave an enlightened explanation.

"Yeah, but it was a result both sides agreed to. This isn't something strangers like us can stick our mouths into. And dragons lack the concept of marriage itself. To be more precise, perhaps it was something different from marriage."

"Why are you talking about it as if it's only natural? I definitely don't accept this, you hear!"

Aleist gave a protest that he couldn't accept it, but here, Eunius grew interested in Rudel's new technique.

"Well, just put that on hold for now. More importantly, you learned a new petting, didn't you, Rudel? Teach me something."

"Recently, I learned embracing and massage, but because Izumi said they were no good, I sealed them. Right now, I'm trying to do something with my magic eyes."

Rudel's eyes were the eyes of the black bird, capable of inflicting negative statuses. After Rudel lost both his eyes in the fight with the undead dragon, he had received new ones from the black bird.

"... Rudel, is your head on fine?"

As Luecke looked at Rudel with worry, Rudel and Aleist cocked their heads. Eunius couldn't believe it, but if it was something Rudel said, then he couldn't deny the possibility it might be true.



'No! I'm going to see Rudel!'

In the dragons' dwellings, Sakuya's large build lay across the ground, flapping around her arms and legs as she protested to Mystith. But Mystith could only

decline.

‘Give it a rest, Sakuya! You can’t properly fly through the sky, and you haven’t even learned how to properly fight as a dragon. At this rate, you’ll only bring shame to Rudel.’

‘I don’t want that eittthhhhererr!!’

While Sakuya was twice the size of Mystith, she raised her body, and reluctantly swung her arms. Mystith was teaching her how to fight.

‘And I’m telling you that’s not good enough!!’

Taking a turn of her body, Mystith used her tail to swipe Sakuya’s feet and send her rolling. Falling face up, Sakuya gave a similar scream as before.

‘I don’t want this anymore!! I’m going to see Rudel!!’

‘Hah, when you can’t even fire a proper breath, what are you saying?’

‘I-I can fire one! I can fire a big one!!’

‘Yeah, yeah, you can fire a big one and a strong one. But it will be fatal if you can’t fire a normal one.’

‘It’s fine as long as I can fire a big one...’

Growing timid with her large, white form, Sakuya was a child transmigrated as a dragon. While her specs were high, she wasn’t able to use them.

Breath attacks were generally the same among dragons, and if she held back to fire one, the fireball would burst along the way, scattering smaller fireballs around. If she fired a big one, the earth was gouged out, and the ground that rose would form a pillar. It was difficult to find a place for her powerful attacks to be of use.

Sakuya was generally a dragon that was difficult to handle. She held the body of a gaia dragon subspecies, and on top of being hard to handle, she was slow in the air. Even if her power and thick skin was peerless on ground, a dragon’s value lay in attacks from the sky.

Attacks that gouged out the earth made it difficult to put her to use in the dragoons that specialized in defensive battles. One would hesitate to lay waste

to the land of their own country.

Therefore, there were many dragons who said to keep their breath at a ‘normal’ level. And Sakuya still couldn’t fire a breath imbued with an element like Mystith could.

In contrast with her frame, Sakuya’s value as a dragon was low. It was for that sake that Mystith was looking after her, but...

‘Hah, I’ll bring him here next time, so make sure you get better at firing your breath.’

Mystith planned to use Lilim’s dragon to call Rudel over. There, Sakuya showed a little motivation, launching an attack on Mystith.

‘Too soft!’

Biting into Sakuya’s neck, she used the tenets of a shoulder throw to utilize her momentum and throw her. Because of Sakuya, the dragons’ dwellings were gradually growing rougher.

Sakuya’s large build soared, and as she slammed into the ground, the area took a large shake.

‘Uuuurrrgh, nno more.’

Before Sakuya’s frequent complaints, Mystith breathed out a sigh.



“I’m telling you, it’s for real!”

“No, but even if you tell me you have magic eyes...”

“You experienced them in our wilderness training during the fundamental curriculum, didn’t you!? Now I’ve become capable of using them. And if I do, I can make someone feel good without having to touch them!”

“That’s terrifying.”

While Rudel desperately tried to explain his magic eyes, Luecke couldn’t accept it. Aleist was also a bit taken aback by Rudel’s thoughts to use his magic eyes and make people feel good.

But Eunius determined it would be fun to test out, and made a proposal.

"Then Rudel, test it out on the girls who come to visit. If they see it put to practice before their eyes, then I'm sure everyone here will believe it."

"... Very well. I'll show you my seriousness."

Having been denied so many times, Rudel said he would get serious and closed his eyes. The sickroom fell into a moment of silence, but Luecke whispered over to Eunius.

"What are you thinking? If he's telling the truth, we'll have victims on our hands."

"Fool, the only girl who'd come to this room is Izumi, right? Then while we're at it, I thought we could use this opportunity to get her and Rudel hitched already."

"I see. Well, I'd like to think the magic eye part is a joke, but..."

As the two of them discussed in whispers, a knock came at the door. Time-wise, it wasn't a nurse, so Rudel opened his eyes, and the remaining three braced themselves to see if a girl had come.

A girl had definitely come, but it wasn't Izumi. With Fina at the lead, Sophina and Mii had come to pay their respects.

"How are you all feeling?"

Sophina held a get-well package, and she left a basket of fruits in the room. Besides Rudel, who she often found herself around, Mii had never spoken to any of the others before.

She nervously hid behind Fina's back.

Fina was expressionless, but she had no reason to go on a rampage here, and after leaving her get-well package, she intended to be off. But Rudel called out.

"Perfect. Fina, come over here."

"Yes?"

The reason Rudel dropped the honorific was because Fina was his apprentice. Those in question accepted that, but the others saw it differently.

"... Since when were you two in that sort of relationship? This is bad, isn't it?"

"Yeah, let's just pray Izumi doesn't come here."

Eunius and Luecke exchanged a look, praying that this land didn't become a land of carnage. Aleist alone didn't seem to notice, and he was the only one excited to confirm the effects of the magic eyes.

"Fina, look into my eyes."

"Sure... (Why do I have to look into his eyes? Is this some new type of game... hah, if someone saw the scene of us staring at once another, I'd be able to spread rumors, and fill in the outer moat)."

Scheming inside, Fina looked into Rudel's eyes. She instantly felt a sensation as if she was being sucked in. It became difficult for her to stand, and be that as it may, her chest felt tight... and sorrowful. As she crumbled to her knees, still expressionless, her face turned red.

"Hah!? (W-what is the meaning of this!? I never thought I'd be stared at so seriously, so longingly... i-it couldn't be master is lusting for me? This is bad. I didn't wear my lucky panties today. Well, they're still white, so will I be able to appeal to my innocence?)"

"A-are you alright, princess!?"

As Sophina and Mii drew close, Rudel averted his eyes and turned to the three men.

"Did you see it, the power of these eyes?"

Eunius was unable to believe what he had seen, and Luecke was the same. Aleist alone was averting his eyes from Rudel.

"... No way."

"No, that's impossible."

"... Don't look this way."

"M-master..."

Her heart hurting, Fina sat as she extended her hand towards Rudel. But Rudel was curt.

"Ah, good work. With this, my magic eyes have been proven. You can go now."

This time, the two women made faces as if they couldn't understand. Fina alone was the same as usual.

"... Eh?"

"Rudel-sama, that one was too cruel."

"... Master. (W-what's with that!? Treating me so crudely... I'm really feeling it.)"

Receiving Mii's words, Rudel realized that wasn't the attitude to take towards the people who came to wish him well, so he gave his thanks. He had grown accustomed to dealing with Fina in her enlightened form, and he unintentionally ended up treating her like a miscellaneous object. Feeling apologetic, he took a repentant attitude.

But the effects of his magic eyes continued on.

"You're right, I'm sorry. I've done something bad to the people who came to see us. I'll have to do something to thank you."

After he apologized, Rudel smiled, and the faces of the three went red.

And with terrible timing, it was then that another knock came at the door, and the guests who had come to visit them entered the sickroom.

## Chapter 90: Extra - Surpass Marty 9

The individuals who had entered the sickroom were Izumi and Millia.

Meeting by chance in front of the infirmary, they were heading to the same place, so the girls had come to Rudel's sickroom together.

Izumi and Millia had exchanged little more than a greeting, the atmosphere turning exceedingly awkward along the way. Renewing their resolve, they opened the door with a smile, only to find Fina, Mii and Sophina sitting on the floor with reddened faces.

"... What happened?"

From his bed, Rudel directed Izumi a smile, but Luecke and Eunius were both averting their faces. Aleist alone, with his confession, was averting his eyes from Millia with a red face.

Millia looked around in wonder, but no one answered the words that came from her mouth. No, when Rudel was about to try explaining, Izumi breathed out a sigh. In the five years since she came to the academy, Izumi's gestures had become mature.

Rudel and the others had grown in height, gaining muscles, their bodies had grown to adulthood. Their faces had been drained of their youth, and all four of them boasted mature features. But their insides were children nonetheless.

"Hah, Rudel, what did you do this time around?"

Izumi arbitrarily placed her basket of fruit on the shelf before folding her arms and staring at Rudel.

To Izumi's gaze, Rudel replied with a smile.

"Listen to this, Izumi! I finally learned how to use my magic eyes. If you just kinda gather some mana in your eyes and tune it, while it doesn't reach the realm of petting, you can make someone feel good..."

"Stop right there, Rudel."

Halting Rudel's explanation, Izumi headed over to the three sitting on the

floor. After sitting them up in the chairs around the sickroom, she made for the side of Rudel's bed. There was already a seat prepared at Izumi's regular spot, and after sitting, she gazed over Rudel.

Rudel also looked at Izumi with serious eyes, but after a while, he averted those eyes. It was only at that moment that he noticed he had done something wrong.

"... Did I do something wrong?"

The boys who had grown heated over the magic eyes looked over Rudel and Izumi.

"Quite a few thing. It's no good to put the princess on the floor, and it's no good to use your magic eyes on a woman."

"Wait, Izumi! If you seal off my magic eyes, then just who am I supposed to practice on..."

As he looked over the sickroom, the bedridden boys entered his eyes. Luecke and Eunius immediately looked away.

"Don't look this way, Rudel!"

"I-I'm not into that!!"

The two of them displayed firm refusals, but Aleist was different. Rudel had displayed the might of his magic eyes before his own eyes. And in the sickroom, the one he had confessed to, Millia, had come to pay a visit. If some mistake did occur, Aleist wouldn't be able to bear it.

The magic eyes' effects had already been cut, but in order to cover Millia's eyes with his hands, Aleist moved his body. He forcibly stood from the bed, but as he headed towards Millia, an intense pain assailed his body. He had suffered injury incomparable to anything he had taken before.

There was no helping that his body wouldn't move as he willed it. More than that, it was surprising he could even stand from his bed.

But the result was terrible.

"Millia, look out!"

"Eh? ... Kyaaaaah!!"

As Aleist suddenly leapt up from the bed, Millia's small chest ended up in his tight hold. Millia's palm violently flew towards Aleist's left cheek.



"... Are you alright, Aleist?"

Having been forcibly returned to his bed, Aleist held his left cheek as he turned his face towards Rudel's worry.

"Do I look alright? I'm in tatters all over."

As Aleist gave a depressed reply, Luecke held back his laughter to enter the conversation. Eunius openly laughed as he joined in.

"Mainly psychologically. To think we had a big shot of Rudel's level among us."

"Even Rudel doesn't do anything that direct!"

"... Yeah. Hey, Izumi. What does everyone think I am? I definitely have an interest in women, but I haven't done anything too terrible."

"I wonder. From the eyes of those around, it looked as if you naturally pull off even greater things."

Unable to accept that he had been used as a comparison in Luecke and Eunius' dialogue, Rudel smashed the question at Izumi. Izumi knew Rudel probably hadn't realized, returning a slightly sharp tone.

On those surrounding reactions, it wasn't Aleist, but Millia's face that went red. She had been confessed to, so she thought it was her obligation to respond, for argument's sake, so she had paid a visit. But the sickroom didn't have the sort of atmosphere where she could give her answer.

(Erk, this isn't the right atmosphere to reject him.)

Aleist definitely had a future full of hope, but Millia was a long-lived elf. Unlike the human race, the time after her graduation was considered too early for marriage. Once nobles graduated, they would be married on their family circumstance, for favorable relations between houses. You could say that now was the only time they had to play around.

But the commoner student Millia was different. As an official or officer, she had come to the academy to work for Courtois. This was her showing that she'd abide the country as a demi-human, and it was hard to say she was working with loyalty.

But she had become first rate, and she did have the desire to get out of the academy and confirm the breadth of her own abilities.

As Millia held her head, Fina, who had been silent to that point, approached.

"You're Millia-senpai, right?"

"Y-yes!"

Suddenly called out to, Millia's voice turned inside out. She hurriedly corrected her posture, when Fina told her they were in the academy, and nowhere public, so she didn't have to mind it.

And before Aleist, Fina solicited to Millia.

"Have you decided your course after graduation? (Well, I already know you're off to the border. But Aleist's right here, perfectly enough, so let's try making an invitation.)"

"Y-yes. It's been decided that I'll be stationed near the border."

It was a station she had just a bit to complain about, but even so, she had a light hope that if she worked hard out there, her work would be recognized. To Millia, Fina gave a smooth and natural invitation to the defenders.

"Is that so. A knight of your caliber sent to the border... that sounds like a waste."

"Is it a waste? I do think the border is an important position."

"No, I certainly must lower my head to the knights and soldiers working hard on the border. But I have only just witnessed your abilities at the tournament."

"A-ahahaha"

Millia gave a bitter smile, recalling how her emotions had gone out of control and how she showed such a shameful side before royalty. But Fina's impression was something different.

"The courage you showed, not stepping back a single step before the black knight, was splendid. So I have a proposal. I would love to add your power to the newly formed defenders. I was 'a little' involved with their formation, so I'd definitely like to gather some hopeful knights for it."

On Fina's act, Mii and Sophina whispered to one another.

"The princess is amazing. To think she could make such a serious proposal."

"Yes, but not just a little, she was the ringleader behind the whole mess. I wish she was that decent on a regular basis."

While Fina did hear their whispers, she confirmed Aleist had bit onto Millia's future, expressionlessly taking Millia's hands and turning her face.

"Senpai, how about it? (Let me nibble on those earrsss!!)"

"U-ummm, if you ask me so suddenly, I'll be troubled, or how should I put it..."

To her indecisive attitude, it wasn't Aleist, but Rudel who stuck in his mouth. By Rudel's entrance into the conversation, Fina put a pause on her invitation.

"Millia-san, do you hate the defenders?"

"I don't particularly hate them."

Seeing Rudel look at her so seriously, Millia ended up averting her face. She still had some part of her that hadn't given up, and come so far, she wavered.

"If you don't have a reason, you should make use of this chance. It's important for proficient knights to seek out a place where they can perform. So when blessed with such a chance, if you don't grasp at it, you will regret it later."

Rudel didn't think the demi-human Millia would be able to perform on the border. It may be different if she was blessed with a good superior, but even if they had the skill, there were many knights without a place to perform. To add to that, he didn't think her work would receive a proper evaluation in the current Courtois.

His house had been prejudice one, and Rudel would often hear such a tale. The knights of his house would brag about the achievements they stole from

demi-humans over a laugh and a drink.

Rather than paying mind to Millia, he wanted to say there were more chances to be had in the defenders than the border. Rudel had seen the ugly side of humans, but before coming to the academy, he had little interest in people unrelated to him.

That he got around to caring for others was a large step forwards. As Millia looked down, Fina called out.

"I am not seeking an answer here and now. Let's see... I'll wait until the second semester. Until then, Millia-senpai, please come out with an answer you're satisfied with. (Master got in the way, but I don't have to push here. It's more than enough that Aleist bit on! If the girl ends up in the defenders, I'll be nibbling on her ears!!)"

Fina forcefully solicited her and tried to shove her into the defenders, but after accomplishing her goal, she gracefully stepped back.



"Hmm, It's precisely because of Lena's quick wit that I was able to maintain the barrier. By opening up a hole at the top, I was able to give yours and Rudel's mana a means of escape. My affinity with Lena is totally the best. You could even call this a date!"

Luecke bragged proudly to Aleist, but this was something Eunius had already heard a number of times. By opening a hole in the barrier's roof, he let the impacts escape to the sky, where there weren't any spectators. By that, Luecke was able to maintain the barrier, and retain the face of the Halbades House.

Since his hospitalization, Aleist had already heard the story three times. It was a stream of him being teased over his confession and hearing out the same bragging in rotation, and to his side existed Rudel and Izumi, letting off a pink air.

As Izumi peeled fruit, she distributed cut fruit pieces to the others besides Rudel as well. But it was clear that her efforts were going to only Rudel's pieces.

Eating that cut fruit, Aleist only listened to Luecke's love stories so he wouldn't get in the way of Rudel and Izumi beside him. Eunius also heard the

story, but he pretended to be asleep to escape.

And the reason he quietly listened to Luecke was that even if he rebutted, he would only get sophistry in return. There was no one more eloquent than Luecke in the sickroom so no one would be able to counter. It was more decent for everyone to just shut up and listen.

Once Luecke was satisfied and the story was over, this time Rudel struck up conversation with Aleist. He sought confirmation about the armor he had ordered a while back.

“Aleist, are you fine with the sizes you sent in for your armor?”

“Eh? Oh, the armor. Yeah, you don’t have to change the size. Even if it’s a bit off, they can still do some fine adjustments, right?”

“Yeah, they’ve already started on it. As long as your size hasn’t changed from when they measured before, they said it would arrive before the graduation ceremony.”

Aleist was also curious about the armor he had requested from an eastern craftsman. He was waiting in expectation to see what sort of armor would come out.

As Rudel and Aleist spoke, this time Izumi added on.

“Are you talking about those craftsmen? Rudel, they’re adjusting your armor, right?”

“Yeah, I needed some sizing, and they said they wanted to see it too. It took more time than expected, but when they came over here to meet me, I didn’t want to get in Aleist’s way, so I wasn’t able to ask back then.”

“I don’t really mind.”

“... Can you have them take a look at my katana too? I’ve been maintaining it since you gave it to me, but I want it looked at before graduation.”

Rudel instantly answered Izumi’s request.

“No problem. I also plan to put in a request for a spare weapon, so I’ll order it while I’m at it.”

"A weapon, huh. My parents said they put in a request to a famous blacksmithy."

Aleist had asked Rudel about the armor because his house didn't have any craftsmen that could make armor. It took a considerable amount of money to keep a talented smith under your wing, and all houses were looking around to take them in.

Even if you didn't have exclusive contracts, you could still put in a request, and since it was a blacksmith recommended by one of the three lords... or so he received a letter of consent from his parents. In exchange, they wrote they would search out a famous blacksmith to make his weapon.

"You did say you wanted the armor before graduation, but they were all up for it, so it might be finished even sooner. They were delighted that they had made something really nice."

Aleist rejoiced at Rudel's words, but Izumi's expression wasn't the best. Rudel noticed her down face.

"What's wrong, Izumi?"

"... No, I think it'll be alright... um, I'm sure those eastern blacksmiths are skilled enough, but..."

Unable to say it clearly, Izumi played it off at the time. Rudel and Aleist both grew a little curious, but after being told it was nothing to worry about, they didn't ask any more.

On a later date, this matter would bring Aleist some terrible regret.



As Rudel expected, the armor was completed considerably early.

Before the final vacation, it was delivered to Aleist. But before the delivered armor, Aleist fell to his knees.

"How about that, boss!? This armor's workmanship crazy good!"

"Totally! You won't find another like it. It has that real perfect thing going!"

"Just look at the horns on it, like dude! It's just the best!"

Giving off craftsmen vibes, some sturdy-looking middle-aged men and an

aged one said such things with serious faces. The reason was simple. When they first came to Courtois from the east, they had lived in a slum-like environment. The words they learned there didn't quite sound so elegant.

They were words they had said with an earnest intent, but they had made themselves sound terribly light.

The fact Aleist's armor arrived meant that Rudel and Izumi were present as well. Before their eyes was a jet-black set of armor, with two splendid golden horns growing from its head. At a glance, rather than an ally, it was an enemy general... a sinister armor one might associate with a lord of evil had been completed.

"Mannn, when boss Rudel told us about black knight, we put all our minds together, and this what we came up with. But isn't it cool!"

When an extremely scary-faced blacksmith sought affirmation with such a tone...

"... It's cool."

Aleist was unable to object. Izumi put a hand on her forehead with a face as if to say, I knew it.

"I'm sorry. I never thought they'd actually go this far."

As Izumi apologized to Aleist, Rudel tilted his head.

"Why? Isn't it cool?"

Before a perplexed Rudel, the polished armor of the white knight was placed. In contrast to what clearly belonged to a knight of justice, Aleist's armor seemed to belong to a demon lord. What's more, gold horns, red mantle, and the gold craftsmanship bestowed around it let off a strange sinisterness.

Dark hero or demon lord, the armor seemed to demand its wearer to take their pick.

"As expected of boss! He really gets it!!"

"Rudel-san, you understand!"

"Boss is saying it, so there's no doubt about it!!"

As the serious-faced craftsmen used such light words, Aleist could only gaze

on expressionlessly.